

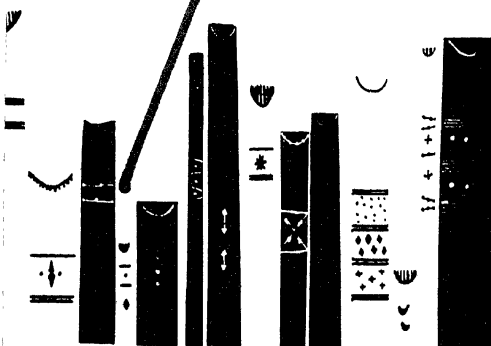


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**Ref. THE VICTORIAN ERA**

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# WALTER BAGEHOT

## *Physics and Politics*

(As broadcast January 1, 1956)

THOMAS RITCHIE ADAM • ELI GINZBERG • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* After making a reappraisal of thirteen Americans, dead within a generation or so, it seems like a good idea to reappraise about the same number of Victorians, because the relation between the first fifty years of the twentieth century and the last fifty years of the nineteenth is very close—and yet the break between them is very definite. We can begin with a man who is a typical Victorian but with whom the break *isn't* so definite: although Bagehot's book was published in 1869, only ten years after *The Origin of Species*, to which it's very closely related in a way, it reads astonishingly like a modern book. It's thoroughly Victorian and yet it hits at the very center of our thinking.

*Adam:* Perhaps that is because Bagehot did write as a modern. He was one of the first to take the empirical scientific approach to social affairs which is now so commonplace. We are probably a great deal more influenced by Bagehot than we appreciate.

*Bryson:* Is that because he had a kind of prophetic quality?

*Adam:* Well, I don't know whether it's exactly prophecy, but what he did was to cut away a great deal of the past; I think that cutting is affecting us today more than we realize.

*Ginzberg:* I don't know that I would describe him so much as the father of contemporary social science . . .

*Bryson:* Perhaps you mean its *grandfather*?

*Ginzberg:* Yes, maybe—or, in Bagehot's own terms, a model for our own work. I'm impressed with the fact that here is a man who used very incisive doctrines around which to build his analyses, and he communicates them marvelously well to his reader. So much of our contemporary social science is really the manipulation of data with no place for the thoughts of the author. I would like to use Bagehot as a model for the way in which we ought to return to a lot of our work.

*Bryson:* I should think on two counts you could use him as a model. One is that he didn't write jargon; he wrote the most beautiful, incisive, flowing English—wonderful writing. And the other is that he didn't bother to offer you figures—he offered you ideas.

*Adam:* Well, Mr. Bryson, if you're going to use Bagehot as a model—and Mr. Ginzberg seems anxious to do that, too—might I ask you this: what of Bagehot's moral assumptions?

*Ginzberg:* Yes, I think it's a reasonable request.

*Bryson:* What Mr. Adam really means is that he smells prejudice in Bagehot, and he wants to know if you think it fitting.

*Ginzberg*: I think we're all prejudiced. No sensible man can be educated and live in a society and not develop certain preferences, certain predilections, certain notions of what is more right and what is less right.

*Bryson*: Which sink below his consciousness.

*Ginzberg*: Correct. And the real question is to what extent one is victimized by one's prejudices or self-conscious about them. I have a feeling from reading Bagehot that he was a conservative Britisher; he really had a lot of respect for the educated upper-income groups, but this by no means made it impossible for him to do a thoughtful analysis of the problems with which he was dealing.

*Adam*: That seems a perfectly fair answer. But the question remains: what is the discipline of Bagehot's mind? Is it disciplined in terms of a study of science which you can say is still accurate and correct, or is it disciplined in terms of traditional moral attributes which we would recognize as true today?

*Ginzberg*: I suppose I would have to say a bit of each, because we do see in Bagehot the tremendous influence of Darwin's book and his evolutionary theories applied to social progress. In that sense, he is taking an apparatus from another field and applying it to the analysis of social problems. But his prejudices, which you mention, are also part of the structure.

*Bryson*: Mr. Adam was very careful not to call them prejudices, but that's what he meant.

*Adam*: Preconceptions?

*Ginzberg*: All right, preconceptions. They also are things on which he builds. But, nonetheless, I think this is really a historian at work, in the sense that he had read widely and thought deeply, out of that he sees certain main trends. I very much like his emphasis on the notion that war is initially a constructive instrument for the building of society; then moving on to the notion of a legal system, which gives stability; and, finally, coming to what is really a unique British contribution to mankind—the use of discussion for the resolution of political differences.

*Bryson*: Yes, government by discussion. I think we can cut into this man at a slightly different point to find the answer to your question, Mr. Adam. Although it may have been infected with prejudice, was his basis scholarly? I mean, did the man talk from knowledge?

*Adam*: Yes, I think he talked from knowledge—and I think he talked from excellent historical understanding.

*Bryson*: And with great seriousness.

*Adam*: With real seriousness. I don't question him on that at all. I still question—I won't push this too far—I still question the whole basis on which he looked at human society, although I think that we today are just as much at fault as Bagehot in that.

*Bryson*: But we don't have the same prejudices, do we?

*Adam*: I'm not sure that our belief in empirical science isn't the same thing as the belief in verifiable progress, as Bagehot called it.

*Bryson*: Oh, I thought you were after another prejudice that was anterior. Bagehot was a representative of that creative level of

British society, the upper middle class—being a banker and the editor of a very powerful newspaper—and I thought you were talking about his social prejudices, his feeling that you couldn't elevate the whole population even of England.

*Ginzberg*: I'm not sure, really, that he would argue that you couldn't elevate the great masses. He would argue that the element of time was an important point. And there's a rather nice statement that has applicability, I think, to American policy at the moment. He says: "One is never sure whether the benevolence of mankind is for good or for bad." By which I would understand that when we are engaged in a technical assistance program overseas, we might try to do too much too quickly; instead of having a good result, it could have a bad result.

*Bryson*: More benevolence than wisdom.

*Ginzberg*: That's right. And I think it's on the question of his insight into the nature of social structure and what it takes in terms of time and discipline and leadership and teaching, that he has one of his major contributions to make.

*Bryson*: I was only trying to discover what it is that Mr. Adam holds back on. I thought it was Bagehot's prejudice about social gradation. You didn't mean that?

*Adam*: No, what I've been trying to do—and I rather feel I've succeeded—is to get you fellows to establish a pro-British outlook on society. Frankly, I heartily agree with Bagehot's concept that political society is a realistic arrangement of human beings as they are, and that human beings follow leaders; they follow leaders who are in a way *natural* leaders. I think Bagehot is one of the pioneers of this discovery, and that it's very important to modern American society to realize natural leadership.

*Bryson*: But it can be fluid, Mr. Adam.

*Adam*: Oh, it's got to be fluid!

*Bryson*: It doesn't mean that the leaders must always come from one social level and that another social level must always follow. He didn't really think that.

*Adam*: I don't think he even *said* that.

*Ginzberg*: What I really believe to be one of Bagehot's strengths is that he made use of what might now be called antiquated biology; antiquated or not, he was a gifted enough man to really push us ahead in our understanding of society. He accepted what in recent years has been called the "Lamarckian fallacy"—the notion that acquired characteristics can be inherited, so that what is learned in one generation can be passed on to the next.

*Bryson*: Still a very common and almost ineradicable belief.

*Ginzberg*: Yes, look at the Russians. I don't know, as of this hour, whether it's still the enshrined biological doctrine in Moscow, but it was up to very recently. But the nice point, I think, is that Bagehot showed how, through education and indoctrination, there really is a transference and selection of values from one generation to the next. Although his ideas on this subject may not be biologically accurate, there is still a tremendous amount of sense and judgment

in the way in which he analyzes the selection of values over a period of time by any group.

*Adam:* It's wonderful to be present at the moment when an American discovers conservatism! After all, is not the passing of values from one generation to another merely the ABC of a properly organized society? What do you *do* with your children, Mr. Ginzberg? Don't you educate them in the values of your community?

*Ginzberg:* The question about education is a good one, because we Americans are so committed to a high order of change, we're so gadget oriented, that we sometimes forget the importance of the transfer of tradition. There are some nice passages in Bagehot where he says that a lot of people have this tremendous impulse to action, and then he talks about the importance of developing the ability to stay quiet. I think that if you take John Dewey as a typical American philosopher, you will find almost a denial of the importance of tradition to the social fabric; every emphasis has been on change and discovery. And in that sense I would say I'm a bad American.

*Adam:* Very interesting, that point. It's what Bagehot calls the "irritable activity," which he claims—and I think his claim is correct—has been the greatest obstacle in the path of the progress of science. He holds that men who have got to work out the basic concepts of science, who have got to be dreamers, are stopped, obstructed, and prevented from performing their task by the wish to be Doing Something. I feel that today, in America, this is one of our great weaknesses in competitive civilization. I think we may fail because we are not properly dealing with the abstract scientific point of view.

*Ginzberg:* Well, I have two references that would reinforce your position. You may recall that Einstein—in his later life, after having been in this country for fifteen years or so—emphasized the disabilities of the serious scientist because the atmosphere here is unconducive to reflective thought; unless one can really get away from the rush and the push of things to think deeply, the progress will be very slow. I notice from my Washington connections, where I do a fair amount of consulting work, that the most difficult thing of all for people in authority is to find time to think ahead—or even to think backwards.

*Bryson:* It seems to me that Bagehot was right and Dewey was wrong. Dewey *almost* says that the trouble with men is that they're lazy and don't want to act, and that all thinking should end in action. Well, Bagehot says quite explicitly that the trouble with men is that they *want to* act but not to think. To me, the great contribution of this book is where Bagehot talks about government by discussion coming after the military virtues are no longer needed; when government by force has become unnecessary and you've created a legal system that makes for stability, then you must have discussion.

*Adam:* That is just what I wanted to hear from you. After all, Mr. Bryson, you are the authority on dialectics. Is Bagehot's concept of discussion really a workable one in politics today?

*Bryson:* I accept your compliment, even though you mean it ironically, and my answer is, in part, "yes." I don't think it's wholly

so; but I think that the pause for deliberation, which is necessary if you have institutions in which things must be talked over, is something that we must grasp as a principle. The basic thing is that we must pause to deliberate, and not judge the institution by the result but by the pause.

*Ginzberg*: I find this book so modern because I keep thinking about examples out of contemporary life. I would say that one of the real disabilities of a bipartisan foreign policy is that there's no proper discussion, there is no real looking at an alternative policy. The United States seems to be rushing around the world and trying to do lots of things—but there are a lot of other things that we *might* be doing and that could come to the surface and be evaluated only if there were real discussion of an alternative policy. This doesn't necessarily mean a Republican and Democratic split on policy, but simply enough points of view to indicate the real range of alternatives that we face. We don't take the time to do that.

*Adam*: Well, there's more to it than that. Bagehot says political discussion must move those who have to act. Perhaps our discussion today is cut off from those who have to act. Perhaps the academic, the liberal, and the man who can express himself all move in one universe of discourse, while the politician, the man of action, moves in another. You have had experience in Washington, Mr. Ginzberg; is this perhaps true?

*Ginzberg*: I am more worried about the failure of busy people to take a little time before they act to think, to reflect, and really to become aware of the alternatives which they have. We seem to have a feeling that doing a lot of things—sending a lot of people around, getting a lot of treaties signed—is really the only effective result in a difficult political world. But Bagehot's notion is that sometimes you make progress faster by just remaining quiet. I could conceive that in certain parts of the world where we *have* acted we would have been much better off if we had stayed out. The thing that strikes me about Washington, in particular, is the narrow limits within which action is determined; this is because people don't read enough and don't think enough before they act.

*Adam*: Perhaps we ought to get back to a discipline of society in which people have to listen, a discipline in which the authority of the academic person is again brought into real social force.

*Bryson*: The relation between knowledge and power in our present society is too distant, the chasm is too deep.

*Adam*: I don't want to play the professional Scotsman again in this broadcast—but I can't help thinking of the Scotland of Hume and Adam Smith, where the working politicians, the working managers of society, really listened to the men who had sorted it all out; they were prepared to debate and discuss in rational terms, not in terms of emotional propaganda.

*Bryson*: But can you do that in a fully democratic society? That seems to me the problem.

*Adam*: There is no such thing as a "fully democratic society."

*Bryson*: Well, as fully as we've become.

*Adam*: If you consider that we've become an *educated* society,

I'd be willing to say you can do it; I think we're becoming an educated society.

*Ginzberg*: I think you *can* do it whenever society finally recognizes that the man who can accomplish things in one area of life, such as building automobiles, is not necessarily a model to be followed in others. In the United States we have this great naïveté, I think, about the transferability of competence from one area to the next, even when it doesn't fit. I'd like to believe with Mr. Adam that we're becoming more educated, but we still have to reach a point where we recognize the field of *ideas* as an area of competence. Until the public realizes that the man who makes the most money is not necessarily the best guide for the determination of foreign policy, we will be in trouble. This will come slowly, as far as I can see.

*Adam*: You were speaking, Mr. Bryson, of *The Economist* . . .

*Bryson*: The weekly magazine of which he was editor?

*Adam*: Yes. Perhaps you can tell us a little more about how that particular magazine affects political judgment and political decision in England, and why it does it.

*Bryson*: You are far better equipped to do that than I, Mr. Adam. But everybody knows that in England an editorial or a leading article, to use the British term, in a great newspaper like *The Economist* might very well be one of the major factors in forming policy, while in this country the attitude of the high-placed person in government is not "What does the newspaper say as a contribution to our deliberation?" but "How are they criticizing us now?" Which is a very different attitude toward the press.

*Ginzberg*: One of my friends, who is a very large-scale industrialist, argues that one of the greatest disabilities in this country is the lack of time that the top people have for quiet contemplation. He feels that, not having time to think before they act, they do a lot of foolish things and then have to spend more time undoing them—so that activity creates its own difficulties.

*Bryson*: That, I would say, is a failure to make the transfer from those stages of society in which the decisive military virtues are most important to the later stage where deliberation is most important.

*Adam*: I think that's one of the reasons why it would profit people to reread Bagehot today; they would discover how the shrewd observations of this man can, and do, apply to modern American life.

*Ginzberg*: Well, I have always found that the people who do the most thinking and planning on a broad scale are still the military planners, so that we have a bit of a paradox here: the area of life which, from one point of view, is the area of activity is also the area in which there is the most thinking ahead, the most thinking around a problem, the most working out of alternative solutions. I think our entire society could learn a considerable amount from the best of the military planners.

*Bryson*: Perhaps it is because the military planners are protected from popular pressure, while the politicians feel people breathing down the backs of their necks and they're afraid to stop and think. Could that be?

*Adam*: That's possible. I think the main trouble with Bagehot

is that, while he's tremendously persuasive, he lacks what I would call the moral sanctions—and there, I think, we've got to provide something that Bagehot does not give us.

*Bryson*: I think that's true, but I'm quite sure that it would do us only good and no harm to read him again.

## ANTHONY TROLLOPE

### Barchester Towers

(*As broadcast January 8, 1956*)

JOCELYN DAVEY

•

PIERRE SZAMEK

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: What Trollope did with enormous gusto and industry was to present a very thin slice of English life, which is completely unknown to people in the United States—and yet he makes us very excited about it.

*Davey*: It would be even less known, perhaps, if we hadn't met Trollope. The cathedral city, the clergy, the government appointments, the fox-hunting squires, the county families—that's a little world that Trollope makes tremendously exciting, tremendously amusing.

*Szamek*: And we have in this story a bishop, newly appointed, who is an overwhelmingly awesome character in his own right, but who unfortunately is terribly henpecked by a wife who should have been a German field marshal. We have his rather villainous assistant, Mr. Slope...

*Bryson*: Oh, thoroughly villainous.

*Szamek*: Yes; he has fingers like carrots.

*Bryson*: A horrible person.

*Szamek*: And then we have a very sweet and saintly but rather stupid young widow, who gets herself into a great deal of mischief, although unwillingly. So we have, really, the ingredients for a very exciting story here.

*Davey*: As with all Victorian novelists, the widow has a fortune. The fact is that these books are always about fortunes and appointments and the government and the Queen, all mixed up together in this delightful way.

*Bryson*: It's what I meant by saying it was a thin slice of life. Somehow or other, Trollope, for all the humanity in him and the enormous amount of human juice that he seems to put into these characters, was only interested in people on a certain level of society. He doesn't go above it, he doesn't go below it, he doesn't seem to think that anybody else—well, no, that's perhaps wrong; he doesn't try to interest you in anybody else.

*Davey*: And you might say, I suppose, that the characters them-

selves are rather thin. At least I find them thin, in the sense that their motives are obvious right away. Now that's perhaps being a little unkind to Trollope—but he does start with people of whom, as they walk into the room, you are able to say at once, "This is a good man, this is going to be a bad man."

*Bryson*: I resent to the depths of my being Mr. Szamek's saying that Eleanor Bold was stupid. She was angelic, yes, but Trollope makes you believe that a woman can be angelic without being stupid, doesn't he?

*Szamek*: At least one thing is made clear: that she is "girded only in the armor of light," and I find that can be very drafty at times.

*Bryson*: But when Mr. Slope grew too familiar she slapped him; for a Victorian lady that was going absolutely out of character.

*Szamek*: Yes, but then both of them fell right into their own private traps. She immediately began to weep at what she had done, while the only thing Mr. Slope could do was to preach to her—and that's a dreadful thing. You can charm a woman, you can enchant her, you can fascinate her, you can be brutal to her, but *never* should you preach to a woman.

*Davey*: But Mrs. Bold finally did marry a preacher, although he was a little appalled at his own preaching. I want to ask you, though, whether you don't think that you have to accept Trollope at his own level? It's no use looking in Trollope for things that he didn't put there.

*Bryson*: And didn't *want* to put there.

*Davey*: No, either he couldn't or he didn't want to. I have some reservations about Trollope, as you may realize. I think that he projected the most amusing and delightful characters—if you go into the book and accept it at that level, you have a wonderful time—but it is only at a certain level. Other Victorian novelists often were able to reach something farther beneath the surface than Trollope ever did.

*Bryson*: I wonder about this word "level"; do you mean the social level, the level at which the characters are penetrated, or what?

*Davey*: I'm looking inside the characters. They work, they work beautifully, and if you don't ask too much of them you will be entranced with them. But you don't see much beneath the surface. Perhaps you don't want to. There are exceptions to this: occasionally Trollope, who is a master craftsman and a delightful, amusing person to read, will let fall a remark which suggests something more than just a pasteboard character.

*Szamek*: But the people in this book don't really *do* much. I was thinking as I reread it of a line of Pascal's in which he says "Most of humanity's troubles are caused by man's inability to sit still in Rome." Or wherever they happen to be—according to Trollope. But it is this same itching skepticism that has carried man on, always; this is like Cleopatra's nose; this is what has caused us to move. And here, in this book, they don't really move much, they sit still and they squirm.

*Davey*: I would have said just the opposite: that these char-



acters, and those in all of Trollope's sixty-five books, are on the go all the time.

*Bryson*: They're on the go, but it seems to me that Mr. Szamek raises a point here of very great interest. It's part of the limitation, and perhaps also part of the power that Trollope has—because he's one of the magicians; if you once move into his world, you get terribly excited about these little triumphs and defeats. But the characters do move around in circles. Their world never changes.

*Davey*: Well, that is the definition of a Trollopean novel. Here he has a number of characters: a lot is going to happen to them. They're going to come in and out, some appointments are going to be made, someone may be born—perhaps illegitimately—fortunes are going to be made and lost, but in the end the characters are still there.

*Bryson*: But a very modern idea slipped into what you said, Mr. Davey, and it seems to me that it would have shocked Trollope. Fortunes are not *made* in his books; they're inherited or lost, but they're not made.

*Davey*: Well, there are speculators in the offing who occasionally make fortunes.

*Bryson*: But they are just on the fringe. The real people either inherit or don't inherit, or marry or don't marry fortunes.

*Szamek*: But even there Trollope had a very Trollopean answer. Somewhere he once said, "If the good people wouldn't grub after money, all the bad ones would get it."

*Bryson*: That's right. But they don't grub, they just marry the right girls. You said something about a bishop who was ruled by his wife. Isn't Mrs. Proudie a kind of central point in this story?

*Szamek*: Mrs. Proudie is not only the central point, she is the axis on which the bishop and the entire hierarchy seem to revolve. She is the lady bishop of Barchester; she gives the orders, she gives the commands, she is, in fact, a Prussian general.

*Davey*: Wouldn't you say, rather, that it's the Proudie-Slope axis? Mr. Slope is the bishop's chaplain, who starts off—and this is a case where a Trollope character really does develop—as Mrs. Proudie's confidant; but as the story progresses, Slope, to everyone's amazement, begins to exert a will of his own. Mrs. Proudie is very annoyed.

*Bryson*: He even tries to come between Mrs. Proudie and the bishop.

*Szamek*: And the truth, I'm sorry to say, is that the bishop is sorely miscast in this book: he should never have been a bishop. A man with a wife as unpleasant as that should be content to be a saint, and let it go at that.

*Bryson*: Unpleasant, Mr. Szamek?

*Szamek*: She is.

*Bryson*: Awful to have around, no doubt, but marvelous to regard in a book!

*Szamek*: Oh, of course, in a literary sense. But I have found myself so much a part of this book that I feel that I'm a kind of assistant bishop here, and I'd hate to have her around *me*.

*Davey*: But these are just the things that make one realize that Trollope was something more than a superlative craftsman. For example, Mrs. Proudie is a tyrant, a virago, who is determined that the world shall go the way she wants it to go, and particularly her cathedral world and her bishop. But, toward the end of the book, when she begins to lose faith in Mr. Slope's reliability and she decides to do things her own way, you remember that she arranges a lucrative little appointment for the delightful parson, Mr. Quiverful, with his fourteen children. Now, I have the feeling that Mrs. Proudie doesn't do that only to spite Mr. Slope, although there's a lot of that in it; she also does it because she's sorry for Mrs. Quiverful. There's an element of compassion. Trollope didn't just regard her as a virago; he thought that when it suited her she could be kind, too.

*Szamek*: I didn't get that impression. I somehow feel that she's a hyena who rarely pauses to laugh.

*Davey*: Oh, I think she wants her way—but the whole episode where Mrs. Quiverful throws herself on Mrs. Proudie's mercy is a rather Dickensian scene . . .

*Szamek*: As a matter of fact, many Dickensian scenes come to mind. I think Trollope had great fun with the scene of the grand ball, where a great many guests are assembled and one of them pushes a sofa, which unfortunately loses a castor and rolls into the lady bishop. This passage follows, which I would like to read because it so beautifully gives the flavor of Trollope:

*. . . She was beginning to be stately, stiff, and offended, when unfortunately the castor of the sofa caught itself in her lace train, and carried away there is no saying how much of her garniture. Gathers were heard to go, stitches to crack, plaits to fly open, flounces were seen to fall, and breadths to expose themselves;—a long ruin of rent lace disfigured the carpet, and still clung to the vile wheel on which the sofa moved . . . anon, a small spark is applied to the treacherous fusee—a cloud of dust arises to the heavens—and then nothing is to be seen but dirt and dust and ugly fragments.*

*We know what was the wrath of Juno when her beauty was despised. We know too what storms of passion even celestial minds can yield. As Juno may have looked at Paris on Mount Ida, so did Mrs. Proudie look on Ethelbert Stanhope when he pushed the leg of the sofa into her lace train.*

*"Oh, you idiot!" . . .*

*Davey*: Doesn't she then make the immortal remark?

*Szamek*: "Unhand it, Sir!" And from what scrap of dramatic poetry she had extracted that, the world can hardly say.

*Davey*: Don't you feel that that remark is a kind of conscious archaism on his part?

*Szamek*: Yes, that's true, but there are some men who are slated in life to be always thus addressed by women—"Unhand me, Sir!"—and I guess Bertie Stanhope is one of those.

*Bryson*: It seems to me that we're in very great danger of becoming too absorbed in Mrs. Proudie's character. Of course, she's pretty absorbing a person. I don't find her hateful, I just find her . . .

*Szamek*: I'd hate to have her around.

*Bryson*: Yes, she would get on one's nerves. But the beautiful contrast is Signora Vesey-Neroni.

*Szamek*: Ah, yes.

*Bryson*: The crippled daughter of a ne'er-do-well English clergyman, who had married an Italian who disappeared in the Alps somewhere. She never left her couch, but from her couch she almost seduced every man in the book.

*Davey*: The Signora—who is, one keeps forgetting, an English girl, the daughter of a parson, although she has become so Italianate—is an example of the thing that Trollope is always doing: contrasting this essentially English background, so English that nothing could shake it, nothing could touch it, with the foreigner.

*Bryson*: And the amusing part of it is that although he gives the dangerous lady a foreign cast, when it comes to downright wickedness he turns to Mr. Slope, who is thoroughly English.

*Davey*: The Signora Neroni is not exactly a villainess, although I suppose she's a vixen.

*Bryson*: She's a flirt.

*Szamek*: Oh, she's more than that, Mr. Bryson—she's a vampire.

*Bryson*: Well, she does cast them off as soon as she can.

*Szamek*: There are some women who seem to make a life's career out of finding men and making amatory yoyos of them—and that was her aim in existence.

*Davey*: Yes, but she doesn't try to *marry* anybody. She just wants to intervene and have a lot of fun.

*Szamek*: But you can cause so much havoc *without* marrying!

*Bryson*: Oh, she likes to cause havoc . . . but you see what we're doing? We're talking about these people as if they were real. According to Trollope's *Autobiography*, he wrote these books in the intervals of a very busy career as a Post Office official. He wrote two hundred and fifty words every fifteen minutes. Three hours later he put a pile of good penscript aside, and that was his work for the day—think of that! When it came out that he wrote three thousand words every morning, and had thus produced sixty-five books in a relatively short life, everybody said "But how can he be any good?" And yet here we are, actually submitting ourselves to the reality of these people.

*Davey*: Isn't that the reason why we go on reading him? We can't read all sixty-five at once, but we do dip into them all the time. He knew his world so well that he didn't have to undergo the tortures of the damned to produce these novels. It lay open to him; it was a world he knew; it was a world that he had always wanted to belong to as a child, when he was so poor and unhappy and miserable because his father lost all his money and everything else; it was a world that had glittered in the distance, although he later

came into it by his own writing and his own virtues. But it was a world that a skillful person with the right gifts could reproduce almost mechanically, and to that extent one has to limit one's admiration of Trollope. Where I think you've got to hand it to Trollope is his absolutely natural gift for comedy and for character creation.

*Szamek*: I'm afraid I object to the phrase "reproduce mechanically," Mr. Davey, because it seems to me that this is so natural and easy a style that we cannot use any so animadverted word for it as "mechanically." It seems to me that this is an astonishing performance in itself: a man who gets up every morning and sits down to write for three solid hours . . .

*Bryson*: From five-thirty to eight-thirty. Let's be more specific about it.

*Szamek*: Now, all of us here write . . .

*Bryson*: Not from five-thirty to eight-thirty!

*Davey*: But *that* isn't why we read the books. We don't read them because he wrote them from five-thirty to eight-thirty. Everybody writes a lot and has to find time to do it, and usually in some mechanical way. I think you shouldn't blame Trollope for the wrong reasons or like him for the wrong reasons. There's enough tremendously moving, amusing, delightful stuff here, and there's enough social sense, enough common sense.

*Szamek*: There is indeed, but to me there is also a *tour de force*. Now, if I find that I have to do some writing, I will sit down and stare at the ceiling and think of cobwebs or peaches, and put down a word and think some more; but to sit down and smoothly turn out such a free and easy and natural and sparkling flow as he does is a tremendous accomplishment.

*Davey*: Therefore we admire him as a person, but we don't necessarily find the books all on the same high level.

*Bryson*: But let's insist on one word that you used, Mr. Davey: You said "moving." I get very, very much attached to these people. It isn't only that I want to see how the story comes out; when I reread *Barchester Towers*, every scene moved me deeply. No, not deeply — but *moved* me.

*Davey*: They're real, Mr. Bryson! And there's another reason for it. I think one reason why we're moved is that we've all grown up in this; we've all inherited the tradition of the nineteenth century, we've all been acquainted with his characters — and when we go back to a book which makes a portion of that era come vividly to life, it does something to us.

*Bryson*: That would be true even of Americans, Mr. Davey, who can't really imagine that cathedral town except as Trollope has made it exist.

*Davey*: And that's why, I think, Trollope's reputation, which had gone down very much before, was suddenly revived during the war. During the Blitz in England everybody was suddenly reading Trollope, because the contrast between the misery, the darkness, the austerity, the lack of things, and this glittering, safe, secure world seemed utterly attractive to the British, and I think to the Americans, too.

*Szamek*: The savor of this book is that of a quiet ramble down an English country road.

*Davey*: And in wartime that would be an extremely compelling and attractive feature. But what revives interest in neglected authors, as in the case of Trollope, depends upon delicate and unfathomable currents. Who knows what really brings them back?

*Bryson*: I think that Trollope has never really fallen out of favor with readers.

*Szamek*: But he's never been *in* great favor!

*Bryson*: No, never in great favor, but I would guess that Trollope has been read not so enthusiastically but more steadily than either Dickens or Thackeray, and certainly much more than Eliot.

*Davey*: You can easily get fed up with Dickens. You love things until you realize that it's an exaggerated world, and then you can sometimes throw it aside. Dickens's world is theatrical whereas this is not. This is flat and real and true to life — and sometimes as dull as life — but it's got a quality that you recognize as authentic and unaffected and unposed.

*Szamek*: The difference, I suppose, is that in Dickens you often get a feeling, a rather distressing feeling, that civilization is after all only the triumph of ignorance over inertia — whereas here you're quite content with a happy, peaceful, serene, and honeyed inertia.

*Davey*: Not entirely content, I fear; I would like Trollope to have brought something out of himself, something out of his own life.

*Bryson*: Yes, but I think in justice to him one might say that he seemed to care a good deal more about what happened in the political novels than he did in the others.

*Davey*: Yes, in the political novels he does make a comment on the world around him. While the "Barchester" novels are better known, I think there's a great deal that's valuable in the political novels — a view of life and government, a view of the way people live, a view of British society. This is beautifully projected, and it is most interesting.

*Szamek*: But I don't think the characters in the political novels are quite as real. When I read about Signora Neroni, I would like to step right into the pages of this book and I think to myself: "Why, I'd Signora Neroni *you*!"

*Davey*: I think the Signora would turn her big, black eyes on you and you'd be lost.

*Szamek*: I am invincible, Mr. Davey!

*Bryson*: You insist upon talking about these people as though they were real. That is what Trollope does to one. These are real people! I don't know any novelist who makes them more real, because I don't know any novelist in whom there is less of the fantastic.

*Davey*: Sometimes you feel that he could have gone on — and *did* go on — for another hundred years writing about the same characters.

*Bryson*: The only thing that brings Trollope to an end is the end of the book, and one has to get there by traveling the path. It's a very pleasant path to take.

# ROBERT BROWNING

## Poetry

(As broadcast January 15, 1956)

WALTER COHEN

• VIRGILIA PETERSON

• LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Certainly Browning was a Victorian, but that was only one of his roles. He was poet and prophet as well. Now which are you going to talk about: Browning as poet or Browning as prophet?

*Cohen:* I think we'll find that we have to talk about Browning as both. During his own lifetime he was compelled rather to the character of prophet; in the nineteenth century people were losing some of their religious faith, and they looked to their great literary men for surrogate faiths—first to Wordsworth, then to Tennyson, then to Browning. In our time we perhaps are more interested in Browning as poet. And yet, to understand his poetry thoroughly, I think we also have to understand his philosophic theory, because his theory is consistent. He states it in almost his first poem and reaffirms it in the last.

*Peterson:* It's certainly consistent in the sense that it is always love; at times it is love between human beings, at times it is love of all human beings, and at times it is love of God. His concept of love as the dominating force in the whole world accounts for that optimism of his, for which people sometimes make fun of him.

*Bryson:* Yes, let's take a look at that. This is not an optimistic time. Is that one reason why Browning has slipped to a low place in fashionable literary opinion?

*Peterson:* Even in his own time people made fun of it. Swinburne wrote a little thing at Browning's expense:

*Being dark, it must be light,  
And most things are so wrong  
That all things must be right . . .*

It's a painful kind of minimizing, because there was nothing sentimental or mawkish about Browning's optimism.

*Bryson:* Let's be quite careful that we don't minimize Swinburne, however, by giving the impression that he didn't appreciate Browning's greatness.

*Cohen:* No; one must remember that on Browning's death Swinburne wrote a sequence of seven sonnets in praise of him, which are very deeply felt and very high praise indeed.

*Bryson:* And don't the people who think they speak for the intellectual fashions of their time always resist optimists?

*Cohen:* We are somewhat suspicious of optimism today because we have seen so many people simply make a good thing out of it, people of whom we are somewhat dubious. Browning achieved his

optimism the hard way, and therefore we feel its sincerity; we feel that it reflects the entire man, that it's not a trick he's trying to put over on us. It's his belief in the world, it's as he sees the world.

*Peterson*: There's been so much death in our time that we are afraid of the affirmation of life, of the inexpressible value of life itself; we're afraid to believe in it because we've seen so much shattered. But Browning spoke for the enormous validity in the fact of existence itself. It doesn't seem to me to be a stupid form of optimism at all.

*Cohen*: We've also lost our belief in some of the fundamental tenets that sustained Browning's optimism. Browning believed in God; Browning believed in the wonders of humanity, in the perfectability of humanity. In his very earliest poem, *Pauline*, written when he was twenty, he faces the world and asks himself a question: how can I bring all my powers to their fruition? He first tries the ways that a young man would naturally think of—romantic love, intellectual interests—and finds them unsatisfactory. In his next poem, *Paracelsus* — Paracelsus being the great medieval scientist and doctor . . .

*Bryson*: A type that always fascinated Browning.

*Peterson*: Wasn't he an alchemist?

*Cohen*: An alchemist, a man of complete and general interests, and a man also who said, "The loftiest basis of medicine is love; it is love which teaches art, and outside of love no doctor is born." Well, at the beginning of Browning's poem, Paracelsus tries to achieve the completion of his personality, the perfection of his nature, through knowledge and power. At the end he realizes that it's impossible, he cannot do it: man is one with all men; man will never achieve personal perfection until all men are perfect. It's not enough, he says, that a few be. But when all men are perfect, then mankind will be in its promising infancy.

*Peterson*: And yet it was the imperfection of man that gave Browning hope. I think that essentially his theology, if he had one, was based on imperfection as well as on perfectibility. He believed that love could challenge all the failures, all the feeble aspirings, all the prejudices and weaknesses of mankind.

*Cohen*: Yes, imperfection in a man brought him within Browning's interest. And, as you say, it was one of the things that gave him hope. For human life is often a failure; even if we achieve what seem to be its highest moments, it still is a failure. But that is what heaven is for: to complete what human life has failed to give us. You remember that wonderful poem, *A Grammarian's Funeral*. The grammarian is a man who spends all his life learning how to live. People ask: what's the sense of acquiring all this knowledge? One never has time in life to make use of it. But Browning replies:

*Was it not great? did not he throw on God,  
(He loves the burthen) —  
God's task to make the heavenly period  
Perfect the earthen?*





that smeared him over, I'm afraid, with sentimentality? It is the last thing in the world that he would have accepted.

*Peterson*: The cult of Browning was also a kind of snobbishness, I think, a sort of highbrow feeling; Browning acquired a reputation for harsh obscurities and for being very difficult to understand — a false reputation entirely.

*Cohen*: But I don't think that snobbishness was necessarily involved. I think it was sincere, and for the most practical and understandable reasons. Browning was a learned poet. His references in *Sordello* literally ransacked the encyclopedia. People found it hard to read him. They imagined, because his references escaped them, that perhaps there was much more in his slightest words than ever they dared aspire to in their humble state of knowledge, and so they got together in societies and tried to interpret them. Incidentally, this desire of the public at large to understand Browning and to find a philosophy in him is one of the things that link him to his age. Browning was, of course, a man of his age.

*Bryson*: He very much lived in the world. He wasn't aloof at all.

*Cohen*: No, he was mundane in every sense. You see, they did artists great credit in those days — more than we do in ours, perhaps; they imagined that a man whose gifts were above the ordinary was in touch with some source of power, and that perhaps he was able to tell them about that source and illuminate for them all of life. Well, Browning believed the same thing. You remember his wonderful poem on music, *Abt Vogler*. He makes the musician say that God has a secret which he delivers through musicians and which explains all the world.

*Peterson*: He wrote a great deal about art and music and sculpture and painting, and I think it's interesting to know that he was an amateur of all of them. He took the trouble to try to sculpt, to try to paint, to try to play the organ. Even though he may have been a fifth-rate executant, he had a knowledge of them that a pure critic couldn't have.

*Bryson*: And yet, is there anybody further removed from the point of view of the mere imitator who runs away from life by becoming a fifth-rater in the arts? I never can forget that passage from *The Last Ride Together*, in which he says that a country girl wading through a brook will catch any man's eye away from the most beautiful sculpture in the world:

*And you, great sculptor—so, you gave  
A score of years to Art, her slave,  
And that's your Venus—whence we turn  
To yonder girl that fords the burn!  
You acquiesce, and shall I repine?*

Browning always knew that.

*Cohen*: Yes. Incidentally, that's in one of his greatest love poems. We haven't mentioned them yet—though how in the world can one say everything that ought to be said about Browning, a man who

wrote the greatest poems on music, the greatest love poems, I think, in English? In *The Last Ride Together* the lover is losing his mistress, she's leaving him, but he consoles himself:

*Fail I alone in words and deeds?  
Why, all men strive and who succeeds? . . .*

Who ever completely achieved all his desires?

*What hand and brain went ever paired?  
What heart alike conceived and dared?  
What act proved all its thought had been?  
What will but felt the fleshly screen? . . .*

But this sense of failure gives him an opportunity to bring in his consoling sense of heaven:

*Still one must lead some life beyond,  
— Have a bliss to die with, dim-described . . .  
Earth being so good, would Heaven seem best?*

*Peterson:* There's no doubt about it, he understood love in a way which no subsequent poets that I can think of have ever done.

*Bryson:* And very few previous ones!

*Peterson:* He understood the difficulties between men and women, the disillusionings and the triumphant possibility of bridging all those disillusionings. He understood all the shadows and nuances of feeling, and he gives us not just the sensuality of love, but the tremendous instinctive heart impulse as well. You get just as much warmth and passion from his poetry as you do from modern poetry, which is so much more explicit. I am struck over and over again by the way in which the nineteenth-century writers dealt with passion without being so bare and naked about it, and yet conveyed far greater passion than our modern literature manages to convey with all its details.

*Cohen:* This power to understand all the situations and all the chances and all the events of love speaks for his marvelous imagination. Probably no poet, with the exception of Shakespeare, had such an imagination as Browning. Because his personal experience was certainly confined only to one kind of love: he had a passionate and completely happy affair with the leading English poetess of her day, Elizabeth Barrett; their married life was idyllic from beginning to end. What could he know of all these sad and wretched and tearing situations that he described so poignantly in his poems?

*Peterson:* The volume *One Word More*, in which he dedicates fifty poems about men and women to his wife, definitely reflects the great understanding between those two. But in other poems he is able to convey a whole world of difference between men and women. For instance, the two poems *Meeting at Night* and *Parting at Morning*. The night poem ends:

*And the blue spurt of a lighted match,  
And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,  
Than the two hearts beating each to each!*

Then comes the next morning, inescapably true:

*Round the cape of a sudden came the sea,  
And the sun looked over the mountain's rim:  
And straight was a path of gold for him,  
And the need of a world of men for me.*

What a lot of knowledge of men and women is in that!

*Cohen*: Yes. I suppose it is because from the vantage point of happiness one can see everything.

*Peterson*: We don't usually think so. We tend to assume that happiness is close to stupidity, do we not?

*Cohen*: I think probably that's only a sort of *pis aller* on our part. We are envious because we don't have it.

*Bryson*: But it's always possible, Mr. Cohen; I think one has to insist upon that. It's rare, but it's there as a human experience that is possible.

*Cohen*: Yes, and of course knowledge is attainable to wisdom as well as to happiness. If it were not attainable to wisdom, perhaps we should never have any glimpse of it—because few of us are completely happy. The evidence that it is attainable to wisdom is in one of Browning's most quintessential poems, *Pisgah-Sights*. I suppose the speaker is Moses, who was allowed to look on the Promised Land but not to set his foot there; allowed to look only as he was dying—and Browning, with his marvelous imagination, becomes for the moment Moses. He says:

*Over the ball of it,  
Peering and prying,  
How I see all of it,  
Life there, outlying!  
Roughness and smoothness,  
Shine and defilement,  
Grace and uncouthness:  
One reconciliation.*

*Orbed as appointed,  
Sister with brother  
Joins, ne'er disjointed  
One from the other.  
All's lend and borrow;  
Good, see, wants evil,  
Joy demands sorrow,  
Angel weds devil!*

*"Which things must — why be?"  
Vain our endeavour!*

*So shall things aye be  
 As they were ever.  
 "Such things should so be!"  
 Sage our desistence!  
 Rough-smooth let glove be,  
 Mixed— man's existence!*

*Man — wise and foolish,  
 Lover and scorner,  
 Docile and mulish —  
 Keep each his corner!  
 Honey yet gall of it!  
 There's the life lying,  
 And I see all of it,  
 Only, I'm dying!*

*Peterson:* But we've said nothing about the rough, about the devil as well as the angel. The devil is omnipresent in Browning's writing. He doesn't ignore the dark side of life. Very much like Shakespeare, he was concerned with the weaknesses and the terrible flaws in human character. It's shown in those dramatic monologues of his which are probably the greatest pieces of their kind, and entirely new in technique. He broke with the tradition of his time to do them. Those monologues are all, in a sense, the rationalizations of characters as remote from him as you can possibly imagine, characters with great evil in them on the one side—and, of course, the good that is in everybody on the other side. Fra Lippo Lippi, *Straford*, *Bishop Blougram*—all these people . . .

*Cohen:* Mr. Sludge! Don't forget Mr. Sludge!

*Peterson:* And Mr. Sludge. He speaks for them and expresses what they are in the most extraordinary way. No psychoanalyst could bring together such a combination of good and evil as he does. He understands that mixture and takes a certain stubborn, fighter's joy in defending the indefensible.

*Bryson:* Yes, that's why the optimism has so much strength. Nobody knew more about evil.

*Cohen:* Browning was a great admirer of Balzac. He speaks somewhere of "the fifty volumes," and how much he enjoys them. Flaubert, some place or another, said of Balzac: "He's always in the ring with his characters, always struggling with them." Browning is doing the same thing. But I don't know that he always emphasizes the devil in these characters, does he? He doesn't say: "This is evil; this is good."

*Peterson:* Oh, no.

*Cohen:* He does, I suppose, what every writer tries to do and what few succeed in doing: make the character present himself through himself entirely. Browning doesn't editorialize.

*Peterson:* Never.

*Bryson:* And often, of course, that means that their ideas are attributed to Browning. But what about the meaning of this message of "love in all its reaches"? Because this man, I think, had the most

completely Platonic concept of love—I mean in the *real* Platonic sense, not the mere impersonal sense. What's the meaning of that to us?

*Peterson*: He grew up in the afterglow of the French Revolution and he believed, as did most people in the middle of the nineteenth century, in a kind of progress based on the perfectibility of man; it was not just a progress reflected in more and more gadgets to brush your teeth with. The American concept of progress means a great deal to us, but we are losing it in a morass of commercialization. We are forgetting the essential meaning of progress: it's the continuous bettering and enlarging of the soul. He had a magnanimity, Browning did, that we need badly now.

*Cohen*: At the end of *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, Ben Ezra says to God:

*My times be in Thy Hand!  
Perfect the cup as planned!  
Let age approve of youth, and death  
complete the same!*

I think that might be applied to almost all of Browning's works, and to all of Browning's achievement. Tennyson, who was also an optimist and who, in *In Memoriam*, pointed out the hope of immortality, lost his optimism toward the end. In his poem *The Dreamer* he says:

*I am losing the light of my youth  
And the vision that led me of old,  
And I clash with an iron truth  
When I make for an age of gold.*

Browning didn't lose *his* optimism because it was based on what is perhaps indestructible in life: the fact that it is possible to love. As long as love exists, Browning can create his marvelous edifice of hope and immortality and heaven.

*Peterson*: He was a kind of Renaissance man, I suppose, in the sense that he was a universal man. He embraced everything. There is no corner of human life, no corner of history, that he didn't poke his nose into. He had an immense and passionate curiosity.

*Cohen*: And there was scarcely any summit of poetry, apparently, that he couldn't attain. I never have such a sense of the wonder of Browning as after a period of reading him afresh, a moment of talking about him. Then he seems to me one of the brightest stars of the literary firmament.

*Peterson*: And yet he had enough generosity to say that his wife's sonnets were the best since Shakespeare's.

*Bryson*: Well, he loved his wife — and he knew, as few other men could, that love might make one overgenerous.

*Peterson*: He loved her enough to become profoundly angry when Fitzgerald, upon hearing of her death, said "No more *Aurora Leighs*, thank God!" And Browning wrote a terrible poem in which he jumped on the bones of Fitzgerald.

*Bryson*: Showing how human he was — because, in spite of his universality, his tremendous scope, the man was essentially human. And that was the very center of his power as a poet.

# THOMAS B. MACAULAY

## *Essays*

(As broadcast January 22, 1956)

T. V. SMITH

LIONEL TRILLING

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: I sometimes think that of all the Victorians who need reappraisal, Macaulay is the one most deserving of it. He seems to have fallen into a kind of over-simplified and completely inadequate pattern of himself.

*Trilling*: I quite agree with you. It seems to me that there never has been such a great change in a reputation as has taken place with Macaulay. No work was as popular in its time as his *History of England* — it was read everywhere — and now I think the shameful fact has to be stated that I give a course on the Victorian period in English literature without including Macaulay. I hadn't read him in a good many years and, reading him now, I realize that I've been doing a terrible injustice to the man.

*Bryson*: As long as you see your shame, Mr. Trilling, I suppose it can be forgiven. But I don't believe we can forgive ourselves for letting somebody who gives so much pleasure fall into neglect.

*Smith*: He had a very great chance at a massive reputation because he covered such a wide field and covered it from such an early year. He was a great essayist — and we're discussing that part of him; he was a ballad writer; he was a great historical writer, and a great historiographer, as a matter of fact. It surprised me to see how critically he had treated the art of writing history from Herodotus down.

*Trilling*: He had thought a great deal about it. It has been said that in his handling of materials for his *History of England* he neglected the correspondence of the period and didn't pay very much attention to it. But it seems to me that the slurs that were cast on him as an historian fifty or sixty years ago, when his reputation began to fade, were quite unjustified.

*Smith*: No historian is ever respectable to other historians after a decade.

*Bryson*: Of course, there was also that great wave of respect for the German historical method, which hit us very hard about that time. Things had to be in what was called "scientific" form; I should almost say they wanted historians to pay more attention to truth than to art. That's a false distinction.

*Trilling*: It's a false distinction. And since no historian can be fully truthful, it seems to me that the historian who is most artful and most engaging, who most involves us in history, is telling us the most truth about history.

*Smith*: Santayana often speaks of himself as a *literary* psychologist. Macaulay was a *literary* historian — wasn't he? — rather than a scientific historian.

*Bryson*: Yes, and at a time when being a literary historian and writing history as a "party" man — which of course Macaulay did — was what was expected. Then you wrote history to tell something — not just the facts, but something about life.

*Trilling*: Which is inevitable, isn't it? Nobody can write history without being in some sense a party man, a partisan of one view of history or of one party in history or of just one set of facts in history. And it seems to me that whether it literally is true or not doesn't matter, but we have the sentiment that is true. I think that's a very moving and very important thing that is lacking from our own histories. I think we can't condescend to Macaulay as an historian at all; he gives us something essential that is, I think, gone from most of our histories.

*Smith*: You might as well obtrude your prejudices — they'll catch up with you and trip you up anyhow. There's one remark where he's dealing with Bunyan and trying to exculpate Bunyan from the notion that he was a blackguard. He says: "It's surely unfair to apply so strong a word of reproach to one who is only what the great mass of every community must inevitably be." That phrase "must inevitably," used of a class society, is a dead giveaway of his sociology.

*Bryson*: That's right. But it was, after all, more than a hundred years ago. The thing that always astonishes me about Macaulay is not how much of a Victorian he is, but how much of a Victorian he is *not*; how he transcends in so many ways all the prejudices — the class morality and the class feeling of his time and his station in the world.

*Trilling*: Macaulay's attitude to Bunyan suggests something that I think substantiates what you're saying about his freedom from the prejudices of the Victorians, although he is so often being accused of being embroiled in them. Actually, his awareness of the inevitability of moral ambiguity is to me very impressive. Look at what he can do with a man like Machiavelli, for example, or with Clive or with Bacon, people who were in very unhappy moral situations. He can condemn what they did, and then quite understand why it was necessary, why it was inevitable, and why it was forgivable. And this is not what we usually call Victorian.

*Smith*: Since I don't know what these words mean—I'm only an ignorant man and a philosopher here, Mr. Bryson—would you allow me to ask Mr. Trilling what *is* a Victorian? Really, what does the term mean?

*Bryson*: I think it's fair to ask him, Mr. Smith. He gives a course in it.

*Trilling*: Well, a Victorian is obviously someone who lived in the age of Victoria and who indulged in what Chesterton has called the

Victorian Compromise. I will not undertake to say what the compromise was.

*Bryson*: It was something Chesterton very much didn't like.

*Smith*: I'm not sure he didn't like it; I think he didn't like to be caught liking it.

*Trilling*: He was rather ambiguous about it. He had a complicated feeling about the Victorians. But I think that what has happened is that "Victorian" has become a word of moral pejoration without any particular precision in it. All the great Victorians were, it seems to me, on their great side not at all what people mean by "Victorian." I think this can be said of almost every one of them, inasmuch as they were all irked by and opposed to Victorianism. There's not one that wasn't, whether it be Browning or Arnold or Ruskin or Carlyle.

*Smith*: Mr. Trilling makes it possible for me to ask, then, with good grace and with certain logical cogency, about this passage. It's apropos of Lord Byron and his treatment by the British public. Macaulay says:

*We know no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality. In general, elopements, divorces and family quarrels, pass with little notice. We read the scandal, talk about it for a day, and forget it. But once in six or seven years our virtue becomes outrageous. We cannot suffer the laws of religion and decency to be violated. We must make a stand against vice. We must teach libertines that the English people appreciate the importance of domestic ties. Accordingly some unfortunate man, in no respect not more depraved than hundreds whose offenses have been treated with lenity, is singled out as an expiatory sacrifice. If he has children, they are taken from him. If he has a profession, he is driven from it. He is cut by the higher orders, and hissed by the lower. He is, in truth, a sort of vicarious whipping-boy, by whose vicarious agonies all the other transgressors of the same class are, it is supposed, sufficiently chastised . . .*

*Trilling*: That's perfectly wonderful.

*Smith*: That is anti-Victorian, as the term Victorianism is generally understood, isn't it?

*Trilling*: You see, he is not alone in saying this. If you read, say Matthew Arnold's *Essay on Byron*, you get virtually the same thing — the same contempt for the middle-class respectable British public, sitting on life, sitting on spirit, sitting on poetic enterprise, sitting on everything that was worthwhile.

*Bryson*: I might challenge your remark that all the great figures of the Victorian era are anti-Victorian. Even John Stuart Mill? That's going pretty far.

*Trilling*: I think perhaps especially John Stuart Mill. And yet, the odd thing is that as you look into their biographies they all have what we feel to be the Victorian quality, that very firm resistance against immorality or even the imputation of immorality or lack of



respectability. There is something that is Victorian, and it's a very solid thing. I wonder why it is that Macaulay's reputation diminished so enormously toward the end of the nineteenth century that a great admirer of his, Frederic Harrison, could write an obituary, a memorial essay on him, and speak of his great virtues but put an enormous emphasis on his inadequacies.

*Smith*: He didn't live to preside at the funeral of his own reputation, however, as someone said of Spencer.

*Trilling*: No, he didn't.

*Smith*: You know, Santayana says somewhat the same thing. He says: "Is not morality a worse enemy of the Spirit than immorality? Is it not more hopelessly deceptive and entangling? Those romantic poets, for instance," he goes on, "were they not evidently far more spiritual than the good people whom they shocked?" He was thinking of Shelley rather than of Byron, but the same thing can be said of both of them.

*Bryson*: It doesn't have quite the Macaulay cadence, but Macaulay might have said it. But it's not because of his *History* that we want to revive him and save him from this loss of reputation, is it?

*Trilling*: It is because of the essays. One knows the story of the publication of his first essay on Milton, what a furor it created; he was twenty-five years old and it made his reputation. From that point on there was nothing he wrote that was not received with avidity. Not merely, however, by the so-called intellectual classes, but by the masses of people everywhere; everybody read him.

*Bryson*: Everybody who read anything at all.

*Trilling*: They read Macaulay and read him with delight. And reading him now, again, after many years, I read him with delight. It excited me enormously.

*Smith*: I presume the essay has an idiom different from the oration, but every one of these essays is an oration. Like Carl Becker, the American historian, he wrote not by ear only, he wrote *for* the ear. And I think men love oratory.

*Trilling*: Of course, they have perhaps lost some of their love for it, or they've been told that they shouldn't love it.

*Bryson*: It's unfashionable.

*Trilling*: Macaulay's style is unfashionable. It was said of another historian that his was "a style in which no one could tell the truth," and I think many people feel that way about Macaulay's style. I don't agree with them, but I think this is generally felt.

*Bryson*: There's another thing, too. These essays are very long — thirty-five, forty thousand words some of them. Each would make a small book today.

*Trilling*: Yes.

*Bryson*: They're not what we usually mean by an essay, a more or less fugitive and capricious little exposition of one's inner thinking. These are very solid scholarly papers, each one of them about a great subject.

*Trilling*: And always going beyond the man who is the subject of the essay to deal with whole periods and large movements.

*Bryson*: Take the *Milton* itself.

*Trilling*: The *Milton* essay constitutes, well, a survey of the

nature of poetry, a survey of the history of the period, a survey of the party politics of the period, and a discussion of constitutional questions. It's a massive thing and a comprehensive thing. But exactly because it is massive and comprehensive in small space, it flatters one into thinking that one has learned a great deal relatively briefly, as indeed one has.

*Smith:* It's not only the solid, massive, scholarly thing to which Mr. Trilling alludes; there is also Macaulay's almost uncanny way of picking up little insights on the side. For instance, he says:

*The images which Dante employs speak for themselves; they stand simply for what they are. Those of Milton have a signification which is often discernible only to the initiated. Their value depends less on what they directly represent than on what they remotely suggest . . . Of all the poets who have introduced into their works the agency of supernatural beings, Milton has succeeded best. Here Dante decidedly yields to him . . . Poetry which relates to the beings of another world ought to be at once mysterious and picturesque. That of Milton is so. That of Dante is picturesque indeed beyond any that ever was written. Its effect approaches to that produced by the pencil or the chisel. But it is picturesque to the exclusion of all mystery.*

This is a very great observation, a magnificent observation. He's full of them.

*Trilling:* His observations on poetry seem to me very acute; however, there are one or two that he made — and notably in the essay on Milton — which have put him thoroughly in the doghouse of the critics. Take the famous remark, which he develops at some length, that “we think that, as civilization advances, poetry almost necessarily declines.” And he goes on to say: “Perhaps no person can be a poet, or can even enjoy poetry, without a certain unsoundness of mind, if anything which gives so much pleasure ought to be called unsoundness.” Now, he loves this “unsoundness of mind,” but he *does* call it that; and he make it difficult to conceive of poetry as flourishing in civilization.

*Bryson:* He had a pretty good precedent in Plato for that point of view.

*Smith:* He says as men become more sophisticated they make better theorists and worse poets, but he doesn't include Milton.

*Bryson:* Milton does break nearly all the rules: a great statesman who's also a very great poet, a great martyr who's also a very great poet. I mean that Milton is so extraordinary a person, and Macaulay gives you some sense of that, doesn't he? But when he turns to somebody like Machiavelli, you expect him to be the typical Englishman — for Macaulay was not only a great English essayist, but a great English politician, a great English public man, and a man of the world. Is that the way he sees Machiavelli?

*Trilling:* He sees Machiavelli surely not as the conventional Englishman of his time would see him. He sees him in time and place,

and his whole effort in the essay is to justify and evoke admiration for Machiavelli. To me it was an astonishing thing, as I read it, to see the subtlety with which he contrives to bring up the cultural and political circumstances of Italy at the time Machiavelli lived, and to show how Machiavelli responded to these forces and circumstances. His feeling for ambiguity of moral position, as we've said before, is very striking.

*Bryson*: He seems to be drawn to the ambiguous people: Byron, Machiavelli, Bacon.

*Trilling*: He is — perhaps because he was a man of far more sensibility than I think people give him credit for. He was in the great world. After all, he'd been in politics in London, he'd sat in Parliament, he'd gone out to India as a servant of the East India Company at an enormous salary; he reformed the legal code of India, he reformed the educational system, he reformed the political system, and he came back with a fortune. I think this must always have troubled him: should a man make a fortune out of political activity? I think this is one reason why he turns to these ambiguous characters.

*Smith*: It troubled his enemies but it didn't trouble his friends. May I say a word about Boswell?

*Bryson*: Now *there* was a person of ambiguous morals!

*Smith*: We were discussing style. I think this is a magnificent moral diatribe on the one hand, and very characteristic of Macaulay's style:

*... What silly things he [Boswell] said, what bitter retorts he provoked, how at one place he was troubled with evil presentiments which came to nothing, how at another place, on waking from a drunken doze, he read the prayer-book and took a hair of the dog that had bitten him, how he went to see men hanged and came away maudlin, how he added five hundred pounds to the fortune of one of his babies because she was not scared at Johnson's ugly face, how he was frightened out of his wits at sea . . . All the caprices of his temper, all the illusions of his vanity, all his hypochondriac whimsies, all his castles in the air, he displayed with a cool self-complacency, a perfect unconsciousness that he was making a fool of himself, to which it is impossible to find a parallel in the whole history of mankind. He has used many people ill; but assuredly he has used nobody so ill as himself.*

*Trilling*: Of course, it's quite inaccurate, isn't it?

*Smith*: I daresay when he gets going he overdoes it.

*Trilling*: Boswell knew perfectly well when he was making a fool of himself. But whether it's inaccurate or not doesn't matter; what this man was able to do was to make Boswell and Johnson alive for us and involved in all kinds of moral issues of the utmost importance. There's no one really who can do that for us now, is there?

*Bryson*: But isn't it curious that we should be talking about a man whose life was so largely lived in the public eye, and yet the thing about these massive essays that fascinates us is the subtlety of them? This is no "strictly beef and ale" man.

*Trilling*: There, of course, we come back to his style. The constant antithesis, which everybody got so tired of and which I now find very refreshing, makes it possible for him to present moral antitheses and ambiguities. So that when he speaks of Clive making a fortune out of India, and says that it was not evil but was of evil example, you've learned something. You've made a distinction, a real one, between an evil act and an evil example.

*Bryson*: I'm not sure that we believe in antithesis any more, Mr. Trilling; we think we have better answers than Macaulay had. But it might do us all good to go back and see how complicated the moral world really is.

## CHARLES DICKENS

### *Great Expectations*

(As broadcast January 29, 1956)

CHARLES FRANKEL • EDGAR JOHNSON • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: *Great Expectations* is a very typical Victorian novel, but it's typical also of Dickens. If this is not too dangerous a remark to make, I should say it showed the power of Dickens in taking quite commonplace material — stock characters, melodramatic plot, and so on — and by his magic making a great book out of it. One would like to know just how in the world he did it.

*Johnson*: Part of the way, I think, is that he achieves a very striking reversal of the usual implications of this kind of plot.

*Bryson*: A kind of Cinderella plot, really.

*Johnson*: Yes, but a Cinderella plot in reverse. Instead of a young man discovering the world and after a number of initial difficulties marching from success to success and winding up in a blaze of glory, we have the precise opposite. We have a young man who starts out with glorious expectations, the "great expectations" of the title, and who gradually gets stripped of all of them. The structure of the book in fact, follows a very neat three-part pattern. You might describe part one as innocence; part two as a gradually increasing process of corruption; and part three as regeneration.

*Frankel*: Of course, something does end up in a blaze of glory, if I may say so. It's a *morality* that ends up in a blaze of glory, it's the morality that the central character, Pip, has learned in his youth. There are many novels that have a Cinderella plot; they tell the story of a young man from the sticks who comes to town and tries to work his way up the social ladder. In many of these novels, however, the young man discovers that the morality he'd learned as a boy is wrong, along with a good deal of the morality that's practised in the cities. But what Pip discovers is that the old morality of the blacksmiths and the peasants is the correct morality. Or have I overstated it?

*Johnson*: No, I think that's quite true. Pip, as you recall, is a blacksmith's boy at the beginning of the story . . .

*Bryson*: He's a kind of apprentice.

*Johnson*: And he is informed that an unknown benefactor is willing to supply him with enough money to enable him to acquire the education and manners of a gentleman.

*Bryson*: And a gentleman meant something in the England of 1861.

*Johnson*: Yes, it represented the culmination of a very important hierarchy of the class system. Well, what happens to Pip is that instead of really becoming a gentleman he becomes a mean-spirited snob who is dreadfully afraid that people will discover his humble origins, and who is guilty of all kinds of evasions, concealments, and hypocrisies in order to avoid that discovery.

*Bryson*: You're jumping over his childhood here — although I know you weren't telling the plot, you were describing this central character. I suppose in one sense the book is all about Pip, isn't it?

*Johnson*: Yes, he is the central exhibit, so to speak, of the moral demonstration that Mr. Frankel mentioned.

*Frankel*: Of course, I don't think he becomes really quite the mean-spirited snob you describe. It's true that he does put on the dog a bit, and he does spend money as any young man who'd suddenly come into money so mysteriously and easily would do; he doesn't get down to serious pursuits, but he hasn't been prepared for them and he's in a bad spot. To become a gentleman he has to buck a hereditary regime. In effect, he's been told in advance — though he doesn't quite know it — that he can only become a pseudo-gentleman, a spurious gentleman. Given those circumstances, it seems to me that he carried himself off almost nobly.

*Bryson*: He doesn't indulge in any of the vices which in 1861 would have been considered almost necessary for a gentleman.

*Frankel*: He does one remarkably generous thing, and he does a number of obviously kind and humane things. When he meets people like Mr. Wemmick, the clerk in the office of his counselor, who has a decent, unpretentious home life, he's sensitive to that; he responds to it, he makes a friend of him. And he has a capacity to make friends because of what people are, not because of their social position. Now that doesn't make him sound like a snob.

*Johnson*: These things are true, but at the same time they appear to me to be mere details in the larger outlines of the story. Pip is himself frightfully conscious, for example, of his ingratitude to the kindly and generous-spirited Joe, who released him from his apprenticeship.

*Bryson*: The blacksmith.

*Johnson*: He knows that when Joe comes to see him, he makes Joe feel uncomfortable, but he acquiesces in that discomfort and even goes out of his way to avoid Joe. He feels that he wishes to cast off these ties of association with the past, even though doing so involves a kind of constantly reiterated sin of ingratitude.

*Bryson*: I suspect that when Dickens was writing this book and publishing it in serial form—and probably this is also true for thousands of readers today — the plot seemed to be more interesting than

the characters. After all, this is a good old melodramatic plot. I think we ought to go back to this boy's childhood and put in some of these mysterious things.

*Johnson:* The story begins with an encounter between the boy Pip and an escaped convict on the moors outside the tiny Kentish village of Cooling.

*Bryson:* How Victorian that is, the little boy wandering on the moors at night and meeting this dark, mysterious stranger . . .

*Johnson:* In the mists, too. The convict frightens him into pilfering his sister's kitchen, to provide food and a file to enable him to remove the fetters from his legs. The convict is subsequently recaptured and sent to Australia. But there in Australia he remembers with gratitude the boy's attempt to help him, and consequently, after he is released from the penal colony on what was then called a "ticket of leave," and makes a success, first as a sheep rancher and then later on in speculation in business, he determines that he will repay his debt of gratitude.

*Bryson:* But *we* don't know that that's where the money is coming from — yet.

*Johnson:* We don't know, but we're allowed to suspect it now and then; Pip isn't.

*Frankel:* Although one suspects that it might also come from another benefactor of Pip's, Miss Havisham. Pip thinks that this eccentric old woman, who had taken him into her house occasionally when he was a boy, had picked him out not only to be rich, but to marry the lovely girl whom she'd adopted . . .

*Bryson:* Her ward.

*Frankel:* With whom Pip is in love, inexorably in love.

*Bryson:* Part of his becoming a gentleman is in order to be fit to marry her.

*Johnson:* Yes, the attraction of the mysterious and torturingly contemptuous Estella is one of the reasons that Pip so dreadfully wants to be a gentleman. When he first met her she expressed contempt for his coarse boots, for his hard work-blackened hands, for the fact that he makes use of vulgar expressions such as calling the knaves of playing cards "jacks." A great deal of Pip's motivation is the desire to triumph over this queenly creature.

*Bryson:* He's in love with her — but he also wants to put her in her place, to prove that he's just as good as she is. And he thinks Miss Havisham is paying the money, doesn't he?

*Johnson:* He believes that Miss Havisham is his unknown benefactor, yes. But there's another aspect to this. I think we should notice that Pip's love for Estella is entirely — and this is one of the central themes of the story — a selfish kind of love. He wants to triumph over her, he wants to get for himself this wonderful dazzling creature who has attracted him. There is never the slightest suggestion anywhere in the story that Pip wants to do anything *for* Estella; she is simply to pour out her glorious benefactions upon him, in the same way that the unknown benefactor has done it with gold.

*Frankel:* Well, that's the curious thing about the book. In a sense

Pip blames himself for the wrong things — and then doesn't see where it is that he has been wrong . . .

*Bryson*: He doesn't blame himself very much until the whole thing goes to smash.

*Frankel*: After he has become rich, Joe calls on him; it doesn't come off at all. Joe is terribly uncomfortable, and Pip feels rather guilty about it, though it's just as much Joe's fault as his. On the other hand, at the end of the book, when he's learned about the sins of snobbishness and all the rest, he takes Estella most happily — although at the *base* of his love for Estella one can't help but suspect more snobbishness. So that the book looks like an attack on snobbishness, but the regeneration of which you speak, Mr. Johnson, looks like snobbishness saved.

*Bryson*: Well, is the return of Magwitch, the convict, and his capture and condemnation (because although he was allowed to be free in Australia, he was not allowed to come back to England) and all of our pity for him and our indignation about the severity of the penal laws — is that just machinery, or is that part of the morality of this book?

*Johnson*: I think it's part of the morality. Upon Magwitch's return from Australia, Pip has a horrified recoil from him, too. He regards Magwitch as a kind of frightful, ugly, dirty, repulsive animal.

*Bryson*: He doesn't yet know that Magwitch is the man who has been paying him all that money.

*Johnson*: Magwitch tells him at once.

*Bryson*: Right at the beginning?

*Johnson*: Right at the beginning.

*Bryson*: Well, but isn't he repelled at first because Magwitch is out of his past?

*Johnson*: His revulsion becomes even more intense when he discovers that Magwitch is his benefactor; he says this man is trying to fasten upon him, as it were, "chains of gratitude made out of gold," and the idea that he must depend upon a man who fills him with such horrified repulsion is one of the things that makes it even worse than it would have been otherwise.

*Bryson*: And doesn't it seem to him even harder to take when Magwitch tells him "I can make a gentleman, and you're it"?

*Johnson*: That's precisely right. It's only gradually that he puts together his feelings about Joe and Magwitch, and begins to realize that he has been ungrateful to a man who has meant well toward him and has tried to help him.

*Bryson*: Then the whole business goes to pieces. I mean that Magwitch is caught and condemned, and the money is no longer available. It looks as though we were headed toward the idea that this young man's regeneration would come out of unmitigated disaster, but Dickens pulls it out of the fire before he gets through.

*Johnson*: He pulled it out of the fire by an afterthought. He had originally intended that the end of the story should be entirely one of disaster. Pip was to lose his money and he wasn't to get the girl, either.

*Bryson*: And Miss Havisham's spectacular end in the fire wasn't to be?

*Johnson:* That was to be a part of the story, yes. Miss Havisham dies feeling regret for her part in the imbroglio, but, nevertheless, Estella was to be married to the loutish Bentley Drummle, whom Pip had always despised.

*Bryson:* Well, she was.

*Johnson:* Yes, she did marry him — but she was originally to remain married to him, and just sink deeper and deeper into enslavement to her animal consort.

*Bryson:* Although, in the final version, she is rescued from him and is free to marry Pip. It's a kind of capstone on a regeneration, but is it really a very satisfactory end to a man's regeneration to give him a woman whom he loved only as a symbol of his own enslavement?

*Johnson:* Well, that was my point — that, in a sense, at the end of the book Dickens gives back everything he's tried to argue against. And yet I must say that if he hadn't given us that ending I would have been terribly disappointed, because, while Pip is a rather ordinary young man and it's only the people Dickens clearly thinks are rather evil who are terribly interesting, nevertheless you get so deeply involved with his characters. I'd have been terribly disappointed if it hadn't worked out this way.

*Frankel:* I'm almost sorry, Mr. Johnson, that you told me how it was originally planned.

*Johnson:* I think Dickens felt that his readers would have the same response, and that was his motive in allowing Bulwer Lytton to persuade him to change the ending.

*Frankel:* Yes, he had to.

*Bryson:* What's the relation of this to Dickens' own life?

*Johnson:* It's a very curious and psychologically fascinating one. Dickens himself had in his childhood spent a part of his life working in a blacking factory.

*Bryson:* You mean shoe blacking?

*Johnson:* Shoe blacking. During a period when his father had been confined to a debtors' prison. This was such an intense humiliation for Dickens that even his wife and his children never learned it from his lips, never knew about it until after Dickens was dead and it appeared in the first biography of him written by his friend John Forster. I feel that in this book Dickens is trying to analyze and understand his own feelings, and, as it were, to emerge triumphantly from his previous enslavement to them. He allows Pip to blame himself so bitterly for his snobbery and revulsion against his blacksmith shop origins precisely because Dickens feels that there was something humiliating about his own concealment of the blacking factory episode.

*Frankel:* You might say that Pip, like Dickens, is ashamed of his shame.

*Johnson:* Yes, I think that's precisely the point.

*Bryson:* But does an artist like Dickens really get his own shame out of his system by depicting somebody who's guilty of the same thing? Did it work? Is this a therapy?

*Johnson:* I think it is a therapy.

*Bryson:* If you're as great a writer as Dickens.

*Johnson:* Dickens was analyzing an emotional enslavement and



working through the processes of becoming free from that subjection.

*Bryson*: But now let me ask you another question, Mr. Johnson. We're sort of using you as an inexhaustible mine of information about Dickens . . .

*Johnson*: I love to be mined!

*Bryson*: Dickens doesn't at any time, as Mr. Frankel pointed out, have this young man do anything very dreadful. He's just a nice boy who's a little too snobbish, a little too insensitive . . .

*Johnson*: He doesn't pick his friends from among those whom he likes. He is actually bored by the group of fashionable young men with whom he consorts. Several of them, including Bentley Drummle, he positively despises. But, at the same time, he is even more afraid that these people whom he despises will find out about his humble origins.

*Frankel*: But it seems to me that he's very straightforward about it. He does it because, in his innocence of the ways of the world, he thinks this is one of the things he's supposed to do. He doesn't hide his feelings from Bentley Drummle. He never convinces or tries to sell himself a bill of goods. He knows he's bored; and the people in whom he confides, the people he trusts, are Herbert Pocket and Wemmick and other quite unpretentious and ordinary people.

*Bryson*: I was thinking that now, ninety years later, a modern novelist would have had Pip indulge in far more vicious extravagances of behavior. He would have had him break out of the moral conventions of our time — if they still exist. Is Dickens in any way protecting himself by making the things that this young man does all rather mild? If he's expiating his own crimes, he's making them rather small. Am I being over-complicated here?

*Johnson*: No, I think Dickens genuinely felt that this was about as bad as you could be — to be ashamed of your own origins. There is another aspect in it, too, of course: although Pip is guilty of no particular vices other than a little bit of over-drinking and extravagance now and then . . .

*Bryson*: And an over-love of success.

*Johnson*: Yes, his criterion of success is one of a merely useless, idle, decorative, financially glorified splendor.

*Bryson*: Which was the ideal of his time!

*Johnson*: It was; and Dickens is using this story, I think, even more profoundly as a criticism of Victorian mores than as a criticism of personal morals.

*Frankel*: I think that's really the point at which you begin to see that there's more to this than just the alleged seriousness of Pip's offenses. Pip is a kind of reflection of the emptiness, the mere facade of morality that existed in Victorian London.

*Johnson*: Precisely.

*Frankel*: The emptiness of success without achievement. The real point, you see, is that Pip is a fake gentleman; one of the things that emerges in the book is that most "gentlemen" are fakes. That is to say, to be a gentleman is to put on a show without any background of achievement or usefulness.

*Johnson*: Yes; in fact, one of the interesting things, artistically, in this book is the elaborate pictures of different kinds of fakery. You

recall the scene where Pip returns to Rochester and walks down the street and is rendered intensely uncomfortable by being pursued by a boy, apprenticed to a local tradesman, who follows him, imitating Pip, pulling up his collar and hunching over his coat and drawling: "Don't know yer! Don't know yer! 'Pon my soul, don't know yer!" Well, this is exactly paralleled by a scene in which a former curate's assistant, who has wanted to become a great actor, transforms himself and tries to regenerate the drama, succeeding only in being as great a fake as an actor as Pip is a gentleman.

*Frankel*: Of course, the one thing we haven't mentioned is the extraordinary variety of the characters and their intense liveliness. They come alive in three or four words, almost the first speech a man makes; there he is, self-identified, and you'll never mistake him for anyone else again. It's an extraordinary performance.

*Bryson*: And yet that's not always caricature. It's only caricature in the very minor characters.

*Johnson*: Yes. With Pip, I think, Dickens achieves one of his very spectacular successes in the way of giving you what ultimately turns out to be a really complex character who grows and develops in the course of a story.

*Bryson*: That's very important, isn't it, because Dickens is always accused of having no capacity for that ultimate end of the great dramatist — the ability to make a character grow, change.

*Johnson*: Yes, but he does make Pip grow—at any rate, return home.

*Bryson*: It seems to me that no book of Dickens proves more than this does that a really great writer can take quite commonplace material, commonplace in anybody else's hands, and with the old magic make it irresistible and tremendous.

## JOHN MORLEY

### *Life of Gladstone*

(As broadcast February 5, 1956)

CLARENCE DECKER • ANDRE MICHALOPOULOS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: Most of the great figures of the Victorian era, the writers and the thinkers, attached themselves to their time largely through criticism of it; they tried to find what was wrong with it. Gladstone in a very real sense *embodies* it, and Morley's *Life* tells us how.

*Michalopoulos*: Morley's *Life of Gladstone* is really a great book, a monumental book, a classical book. I think it's as great as its great subject.

*Bryson*: That's saying a good deal.

*Michalopoulos*: But not too much. It gives you a complete picture of Gladstone; it's a very long book, it's a very scholarly book, it's a very complete book; the research is remarkable—no detail of Gladstone's life is omitted.

*Decker*: Well, of course, Morley was in a very strategic position to write about his hero. He himself held a great many political offices, he knew most of the great Victorians intimately, and he was involved in some of the most agitated events of English history, or at least of the nineteenth century.

*Michalopoulos*: And he was also a great biographer.

*Bryson*: He was a great biographer and, in a very curious way, as great biographers often are not, he was very much like his hero. He too was an intellectual in politics, he too was a liberal.

*Decker*: He does show Gladstone through a kind of haze of reverence; he really loved the man, had a deep and abiding affection for him. There's no cynicism or skepticism in the book — and yet, when you're all through you feel that you have a very honest portrait.

*Michalopoulos*: I must say that after reading the book, I come away with a feeling of awe. I think that is the word to describe what one feels about Gladstone: awe, and reverence.

*Bryson*: All of us were brought up with the idea that the nineteenth century in England was full of great, eloquent hypocrites who were seeing to it that England got the best of everything, behind a smoke-screen of piety, and that Gladstone was the greatest of them all.

*Decker*: As a matter of fact, if you look in the dictionary, the only definition of Victorian that it gives, apart from the very flat one of "pertaining to the reign of Queen Victoria of England," is in these words: "Fastidious, prudish, or narrow in opinion and expression, particularly regarding conduct." There's not one word in the dictionary about the really great qualities of the Victorian era. But I think that now the tide of criticism is turning, the reaction against Victorianism is drawing to a close; after half a century we have a better perspective and a sounder evaluation, and we're now coming to see the real qualities of a period that, from my point of view, is as great in its own way as the Elizabethan period was in the sixteenth century.

*Michalopoulos*: But you qualify that by saying "in its own way."

*Decker*: Well, in the Elizabethan period you had a great revival of learning, great exploration, and the opening of the world geographically. In the nineteenth century the revolution, or the renaissance, was in the field of science, in the field of intellectual ideas, in the growth of industry, and in the bringing of the world into a larger unity.

*Michalopoulos*: This is very true. And I think one of the characteristics of the Victorian era — certainly in the case of Gladstone it would seem to be true — was a spirit of righteousness, which is quite different from hypocrisy or prudishness.

*Bryson*: They believed in what they said.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, Gladstone was a righteous man and really believed in what he said. Today he seems to us a bit austere, a bit old-fashioned.

*Decker*: But I think you find that tone in Morley's book, because Morley himself had a good deal of the moral earnestness of the period.

What biographer today, for example, would write such a paragraph as this about his hero:

*We call men great for many reasons apart from service wrought or eminence of intellect or even from force and depth of character. To have taken a leading part in transactions of decisive moment; to have proved himself able to meet demands on which high issues hung; to combine intellectual qualities, though moderate yet adequate and sufficient, with the moral qualities needed for the given circumstance—with daring, circumspection, energy, intrepid initiative; to have fallen in with one of those occasions in the world that impart their own greatness even to a mediocre actor, and surround his name with a halo not radiating from within but shed upon him from without—in all these and many other ways men come to be counted great. Mr. Gladstone belongs to the rarer class who acquired authority and fame by transcendent qualities of genius within, in half independence of any occasions beyond those they create for themselves.*

*Michalopoulos:* Yes, that's a wonderful passage. And do you know what it brings to mind? The fact that the Victorians were great classical scholars. There is the ring of Ciceronian prose in those words, and I don't say that in a derogatory sense at all. I wish more people today read Cicero and could master his periods.

*Bryson:* They were trained in the classics. This was not accidental. When it worked, it produced an extraordinary kind of mind, an extraordinary kind of character. But I wonder whether one could get the public of today to read a book like Morley's *Gladstone*? It would have to be drastically condensed, of course. There's too much old politics in it.

*Michalopoulos:* It would lose by being curtailed. At the same time, it is a heavy book to read through—there's no doubt about that. It's partly, you might say, a book of reference, because it has everything in it. Reading it is no mean task, I assure you.

*Bryson:* Two thousand pages.

*Michalopoulos:* And quite a business to read. But when I was on some minor subject, I would say to myself, "Well, this I can skip"—and then, reading on, I became fascinated by the way even that minor subject was treated. And I read on and on and on.

*Decker:* To make a very practical suggestion, I would urge people to begin by reading the first chapter and the last chapter; and then there is a wonderful index in the book—go through and pick out all the topics that are of importance or of interest today and read those sections to see how the problems were handled by Mr. Gladstone. I think our generation can learn a lot from his approach to politics, and certainly from the way that Mr. Morley has written them in his beautifully sensitive and illuminating and clear style. There's no padding in the book. It is solid writing, but it's always a delight to read it.

*Michalopoulos:* And at the same time he has his little quips. I

mean that he has a great sense of humor; it isn't all just heavy admiration. There's that little passage where he describes the tragic incidents of the sixth of May, 1882, in Ireland, when the Viceroy and the Irish Secretary were murdered by the Irish. He says:

*The afternoon of that fatal sixth of May was passed by the new Viceroy and Lord Frederick in that grim apartment in Dublin Castle where successive secretaries spend unshining hours in saying No to impossible demands, and hunting for plausible answers to insoluble riddles.*

*Decker:* Wonderful passage!

*Bryson:* It sums up the British despair over the Irish question. And in the Irish question Mr. Gladstone took quite a part. We say that he was the dominant political figure of the time. Was this only because of his Parliamentary eloquence, his capacity to make even a budget message exciting to members?

*Michalopoulos:* Oh no, Mr. Bryson: much more than that. It goes right down to the roots of his character.

*Bryson:* Well, the roots of his character lie in very pious beginnings.

*Michalopoulos:* In the beginnings of a missionary. When he was twenty-two he declared, according to Morley:

*... that his duty summons him with a voice too imperative to be resisted ... to take upon himself the clerical office. The need of devotion to that office must be plain to anyone who "casts his eye over the moral wilderness of the world, who contemplates the pursuits, desires, designs and principles of the beings that move so busily in it without an object beyond the finding of food mental or bodily, for the present moment."*

*Decker:* Although his father dissuaded him from entering the ministry, I think that he actually remained a clergyman all his life—but as one who performed his duties not in the parish but in Parliament.

*Bryson:* In a very practical way.

*Decker:* That's right. But the curious thing is that he was always doubtful of his worthiness to serve and he frequently said a silent prayer before he addressed the House of Commons. Prince Albert, Victoria's consort, greatly admired Gladstone's piety and his moral earnestness, qualities which had impressed his classmates at Eton and Oxford. And when he first became Prime Minister in 1868, he wrote in his diary: "The Almighty seems to sustain and spare me for some purpose of His own, deeply unworthy as I know myself to be. Glory be to His Name."

*Bryson:* More than half a century of running the British Empire is what He had in store for him.

*Michalopoulos:* I think that one of the very sad things for Mr. Gladstone was the death of Prince Albert, because he really did appreciate Gladstone's qualities and the Queen listened to everything

Albert said. After his death there was a certain, well, aloofness in the Queen's attitude toward Gladstone; she was mesmerized by the more dazzling qualities of Disraeli.

*Decker*: She once wrote in her diary after Gladstone had been to see her that "he speaks to me as if I were a public meeting." She knew, of course, that she *was* an institution—but to be considered only in that light was for her, the woman, thoroughly unbearable.

*Bryson*: And Disraeli was just clever enough to take advantage of those small vanities in the Queen.

*Michalopoulos*: Take advantage! What do you think the giving of the Crown of India was? A piece of supreme flattery to a feminine Queen.

*Bryson*: A great gesture of courtship, as a matter of fact.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, of courtship. She delightedly asked him: "Are you *really* going to make me an Empress?" That was her spontaneous reaction.

*Bryson*: Mr. Gladstone wouldn't stoop to that sort of thing.

*Michalopoulos*: Of course not! He was much too great.

*Decker*: I think we ought to look at Mr. Gladstone, really, as an exponent of his age. He was the personal antagonist of another great Prime Minister, Disraeli, and the two men, of course, were the protagonists of the Victorian period. Disraeli stood for the rise of British imperialism and the consolidation of its far-flung empire, the empire on which the sun never set, whereas in Gladstone you had the embodiment of British conscience in the nineteenth century. The curious thing is that Disraeli began his career as a professed radical and wound it up as a Tory, and in the case of Gladstone you have a man who began his career as a high Tory and ended it as a Liberal on the verge of radicalism. That's not too unusual in British politics—Churchill, I believe, twice crossed the floor of the House of Commons in reverse directions—but in this country it certainly would be a rather unusual situation.

*Michalopoulos*: In the case of Gladstone it was a gradual and perhaps a natural progression. I mean that he arrived at liberalism by a process of gradual evolution from extreme Toryism to the milder conservatism of the Peelites. I think Gladstone was never really inconsistent. It was a case of natural evolution. Now when he started out, of course, he was a very young man and was impressed by people in high office. That is evident in the fact that at one time he was investigating the origin of his name. He wanted to discover whether it had originated in the early Scottish nobility. This is quite human, but he would never have cared about such things in later life. Again, his first election, at Newark, was owing to the patronage of the Duke of Newcastle. He was very impressed when he first called on the Duke. Newark was virtually a rotten borough: if Newcastle wanted him to be elected, he would be—and that was that. The prestige of a Duke still meant something to the young Gladstone.

*Decker*: The important point that you stressed at the beginning, Mr. Michalopoulos, can be reemphasized; in spite of the fact that he started out as a Tory and ended up as a Liberal, there

is a singular unity throughout his life. In the first place, he really was a great Christian, and he tried to apply that moral earnestness to practical politics. I think it was Lord Salisbury who once described him as "Oxford on the surface, Manchester below." Here you have a man who was very devout, very religious, very moral, but who probably made more contributions to practical internal reforms in government than almost any other single great figure that I can think of in the last hundred years.

*Bryson:* But don't forget that while he was making his great reforms in government, he was also in a very real sense the architect of England's technological and economic greatness.

*Decker:* Oh, there's no doubt about it!

*Bryson:* The greatness of England as the dominant financial power of the world owes as much to Gladstone, I should think, as to any other man in politics.

*Decker:* We often say that we want to balance the budget, but as Chancellor of the Exchequer Gladstone actually did it. He introduced new forms of taxes, he introduced land reform, he improved the electoral machinery, he extended the suffrage—and he did all of these things with such nobility and eloquence that people would hang on his words when he spoke in the House of Commons.

*Michalopoulos:* Yes, Morley says somewhere that he had the gift of introducing into the most arid financial and economic subjects a brilliance that moved the interest of the House, which wouldn't listen to any other Chancellor of the Exchequer. By the way, it's interesting to note that Disraeli was three times, if not four times, Chancellor of the Exchequer—and *his* budgets were bad budgets.

*Bryson:* I think I know the reason—I'm going to guess at it, anyway. Disraeli wasn't translating into practical action this Christianity that we've been talking about. During the eighty-odd years of Mr. Gladstone's life the actual living conditions of the British people were being improved, and everything he did for the improvement of the business potential of Britain had to some extent an improving effect upon the life of the people. That's what he cared about.

*Decker:* He was born in 1809, and he died in 1898, so that his life itself was virtually identical with the Victorian period. His actions and his point of view, I think, represent the really great and high traditions of the Victorian era.

*Michalopoulos:* At the same time, he was a very exceptional man for that era. He had a deep feeling for the laboring classes. Morley quotes him as saying: "If you want to benefit the laboring classes it is not enough to operate upon the articles consumed by them: you should rather operate on the articles that give them the maximum of employment." He's completely practical.

*Bryson:* He's a working economist as well as a Christian statesman. I think you can expand this picture. You can take into account his attitude toward the Irish, his attitude toward international affairs, his hatred of the misbehavior of the Turkish Government toward the Armenians and the oppressed Christians in the Middle East. There was one moral principle in his mind: in statecraft or

personal behavior, right was right and wrong was wrong.

*Decker:* In many ways he reached the greatest heights of his oratory and of his passionate belief in Christianity after he was outraged by the Turkish massacre of the Armenians. You remember that he was out of office, he had not more than nine or ten years to live, and he wanted to devote the remainder of his life to making further translations of Homer and Horace and Virgil. He was a great scholar; he had actually published a three-volume work on Homer, which is a rather interesting thing, I think, for a Prime Minister to have done. But he was so upset by the Turkish massacre that he toured the country from one end to the other, making speeches of great eloquence against the brutality of big nations picking on little nations. In that sense he really belongs to the twentieth century rather than to the nineteenth.

*Michalopoulos:* And it is quite interesting to note that in one case, a colonial case, he faced a problem which exists in the same part of the world today: the Ionian Islands were clamoring for union with Greece. Incidentally, I was Governor of them at one time.

*Bryson:* Not in Gladstone's time, Mr. Michalopoulos!

*Michalopoulos:* Not quite, no. The population of those islands were clamoring for union with Greece and he went out there as High Commissioner for six months; when he came back he was instrumental through Lord Palmerston in having those islands handed over to Greece. This is exactly the same situation that exists in Cyprus today. Gladstone deplored the measures of extreme severity imposed on the population by the British Governor through ignorance and stupidity.

*Bryson:* He believed in the greatness of England, he believed in the greatness of the English industrial system, he believed in the balance of power, but I'm not always sure that he believed in the Empire.

*Decker:* I think he would believe in the Commonwealth, certainly.

*Bryson:* Oh, yes!

*Decker:* He laid the groundwork for it, but in the large sense I think we can say of Gladstone that his life was really devoted to peace, stability, and above all social responsibility. He disliked profusion, extravagance, recklessness—those qualities which he thought were embodied in his great opponent, Disraeli; and as I said before, he also disliked what he thought was Disraeli's bullying of weak nations. He held to a single morality for both individuals and states—a principle that might be questioned, but certainly a great principle. He sought, according to his lights, to bring the Golden Rule into operation in the intercourse of nations. His austerity, his moral earnestness, his rather Jovian manner made him more an object of veneration, perhaps, than of inspiration, but I think that the ideas and ideals of Gladstone are very difficult to match. In a way they are a model for our generation and for other generations to come.

*Michalopoulos:* I agree with you entirely, Mr. Decker. I am very much impressed by the words with which Morley's book ends.



It's a precept of Gladstone's, I think a precept that he communicated to some schoolboys when he talked to them: "Be inspired with the belief that life is a great and noble calling: not a mean and groveling thing that we are to shuffle through as we can, but an elevated and lofty destiny." The whole man is in that.

*Bryson*: Yes, and I don't believe that it is just distance that makes this man loom so great. I think we're always handicapped with our contemporaries because we can't quite see them in size; but here, through Morley who knew him so well and describes him so magnificently, we see the true stature of the man.

## ALFRED TENNYSON

### *The Idylls of the King*

(As broadcast February 12, 1956)

JOHN CIARDI

• EDWARD DAVISON

• LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: It must have been in response to what he thought was his patriotic duty that Tennyson undertook to write a big poem about a big subject. But *The Idylls of the King* didn't come out as the epic which, I suppose, at one time he thought he was bound to produce if he could.

*Davison*: I think the very fact that Tennyson called this work *The Idylls of the King*, following some other pastoral idylls that he'd written, is a kind of implicit confession that he didn't really intend it to be an epic. Of course, it has certain elements of the epic in it: it's full of Homeric similes, it's based upon a mythology of sorts, it has a central hero and heroine as well as other heroes. But I don't think it was patterned as an epic from the beginning. Though an epic has episodes, the epic poet doesn't write episodically; he has a pattern for the whole thing. Tennyson was writing a series of narratives. He began with four in the first book, which are much more narrative than epic. Later on, as he began to write the other books some ten or twelve years afterwards, he tried to draw all these different episodes together into a pattern with a general theme. And that's not, I think, the right way to write an epic.

*Ciardi*: I agree with you completely. I think it's very much to the point that he was, in fact, called to do his duty as laureate. The *Edinburgh Review* called upon him to produce a first-class poem on a great subject, for the greater glory of whatever.

*Bryson*: And he dug into Britain's past to find something that he thought might be a suitable subject.

*Ciardi*: There, I think, he made his mistake. I seriously believe that Tennyson was not emotionally ripe for the epic material of the Arthurian legend.

*Bryson:* You think that the stories of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table were—what? Too medieval? Too Celtic?

*Ciardi:* They were, in a sense, too primitive for a man who accepted Tennyson's intellectual surfaces of responsibility; the original Arthurian material was interwoven so profoundly with the epic tradition, the cult of prowess for its own sake . . .

*Bryson:* Personal prowess.

*Ciardi:* Yes. As good a symbol as any would be Roland's great stunt in the *Chanson de Roland*: he swung his sword so mightily that when he hit his enemy on the top-knot, he claved him in two, so that one half fell off the horse in one direction and the other half in the other; and if it was really a good stroke, it would even break the backbone of the horse. Now there's no moral purpose in this. It's just the fundamental ego of tribal man. He's just *mucho hombre*. He's a better ape than the next ape. There's no human value.

*Davison:* Tennyson, of course, was interested in another thing: what might be called moral heroism, rather than physical heroism. And when he chose the Arthurian story for his subject, I think he was very much influenced by the fact that Arthur was the first mythical Christian king.

*Bryson:* His Christianity being mythical as well as everything else about him.

*Davison:* That's right—because, after all, practically nothing is known of Arthur. In any case, he wasn't English, he was Celtic. The whole story is Celtic: it exists just as much in Brittany and France and Ireland as it does in England. It was first written up by Geoffrey of Monmouth, and then it comes into *The Mabinogion*, which was translated just about the time Tennyson was beginning to get interested in the theme. It has always impressed me, from a critical point of view, that the first four *Idylls*, which came out in the volume of 1859, are the easiest; they are more clearly narrative than the others and are less pretentious in the sense that the moral underlay, the supposed symbolic significance, is not so powerful there. It was only later, when he wrote the other books and tried to draw these earlier ones into the pattern of the whole thing, that he began to lay so much emphasis upon the symbolic aspects. And that was very considerably the result of pressure from his friends.

*Bryson:* To be more "Victorian."

*Davison:* Well, in a sense.

*Ciardi:* The trouble is, I think, that a man cannot sit down and will himself to write a poem out of duty. And to a very considerable extent, from 1842 until the last *Idyll* appeared in 1885, Tennyson found himself in a position of duty to fulfill, rather than of self to express. I observe my own children to no purpose if not to discover that people wrestle for the sake of wrestling before they wrestle for moral considerations. Tennyson was not the personality type to respond to this deep fundamental thing: I don't think he responded to the real vibrations of love, of passion; I don't think he responded even to the sacramental quality of the Holy Grail idea. He was too much of a rationalist to let go. There is much more of the epic quality in something like *The Ballad of Chevy Chase*:

*For Witherington needs must I wayle  
as one in dolefull dumpes,  
For when his leggs were smitten of,  
he fought upon his stumpes.*

Now that's just a terrific stunt for its own sake.

*Davison*: This brings us back, really, to the perennial problem of the poet, especially the poet who's been recognized as one with a most promising future. Remember that after Tennyson's first successful book, he remained silent for how many years—twelve, wasn't it?

*Ciardi*: Quite a long time. He was morbidly sensitive to the reviewers.

*Davison*: Very sensitive indeed, and would not publish. In fact, his manuscripts circulated only among a few friends, and he almost lost some friendships by refusing to contribute to periodicals that were being edited by his fellow poets. During that time he was under all kinds of pressures. His friends were saying to him: "You are our next great poet; you have got to find a great theme." Now, every poet up to that time had tried to find some major theme for his major work. You may remember—it's always interested me very much—that Milton for twenty years contemplated using the Arthurian story for his great work and finally decided instead upon *Paradise Lost*. He considered about twenty different subjects. But others touched upon it, too, although Spenser had not really dealt with the Arthurian legend as such; he'd extended it, he'd used it as a point of departure.

*Bryson*: And between Spenser and Tennyson there are a couple of centuries of change in both attitudes and circumstances. It must have been much harder for Tennyson.

*Davison*: I think it was harder in this sense: that every poet, whether he likes it or not, is to some extent pinioned by the convictions and requirements of his own age.

*Ciardi*: But this is the point, I think, at which the truly great ones declare themselves. Tennyson made a serious mistake, and I think it was a mistake involved in the limitations of his personality. It's part of what keeps him from being a great poet in the final sense. The truly great ones have to find out who they are. Tennyson never really discovered. He did have a magnificent talent for despair, if that's not a contradiction in terms; he was a man of moods, of truly dark moods, of profundities that stirred from the very bottom of the unconscious. And poetry is more than a rational thing, it's total communication. It has to get under the brain or behind it or above it—but beyond it in some way. Tennyson let himself be sold a bill of goods by his generation. The final poet has more sales resistance than this: he has to buy straight from the psyche.

*Davison*: I think that happened, of course, with most of Tennyson's contemporaries. They all wrote with only part of themselves—even Dickens, who, in my opinion, is one of the greatest writers who ever wrote.

*Bryson*: Is this Victorianism?

*Davison*: I think so, yes. I think it was the climate of the age. There were certain things — especially in the earlier days of the Victorian era; it changed towards the end — there were certain things you did not dwell upon. The one exception to that possibly is Browning, but then Browning lived out of England for the greater part of those years.

*Ciardi*: I think it's very interesting to note that Tennyson, though in private life he had a very fine sense of humor, never produced a comma of humor in his poems, as far as I know. I like the little story of his being asked what he thought of Whitman. His answer was, with a roar, "He's a great big something!" He didn't know what. Now, never does this part of the man enter the poems — and I think in the truly great poets you have a sense of having touched everything in the man.

*Davison*: In the very greatest, yes. But is any of us claiming for a moment that Tennyson belongs in the ranks of the very greatest? I would say that Tennyson had many very deep defects. Not poetical defects, as such — he was an extremely skillful metrist; he had a most marvelous ear; he was one of the very best landscape poets who ever wrote, or seascape poets, for that matter; he had a most astonishing command of what I call atmospherics.

*Ciardi*: Isn't it exactly to the point that there are times when his very skill as a metrist led to the badness of the poem because he took it too ponderously, too heavily?

*Davison*: Without any doubt.

*Ciardi*: I have in mind C. S. Calverly's marvelous parody of *The Brook*. I'd like to read it, as a matter of fact, next to what I think is the worst passage in *The Idylls of the King*. This is Calverly:

*Thus on he prattled like a babbling brook,  
Then I, "The sun hath slipt behind the hill,  
And my Aunt Vivian dines at half-past six."  
So all in love we parted; I to the Hall,  
They to the village. It was noised next noon  
That chickens had been missed at Syllabub Farm.*

That's enormously skillful parody, and I think . . .

*Bryson*: I want to protest one thing here: that if I didn't know the English language, didn't know what those words meant, that would have been an extraordinary beautiful piece of verse.

*Ciardi*: Exactly. But also tremendously empty. Now listen to this passage from the *Idylls*, from the one called *Balin and Balan*. This is Tennyson:

*. . . So coming to the fountain-side beheld  
Balin and Balan sitting statue-like,  
Brethren, to right and left the spring, that down,  
From underneath a plume of lady-fern,  
Sang, and the sand danced at the bottom of it.  
And on the right of Balin Balin's horse  
Was fast beside an alder, on the left  
Of Balan Balan's near a poplar-tree.*

It's *enormously* heavy-handed and . . .

*Bryson*: Now I want to file a protest against you two poets, who are taking a poet — certainly not of the greatest but still a great one — and pretending that you judge a poet by his worst. You don't.

*Ciardi*: Oh, no such thing! I have the greatest admiration for Tennyson.

*Bryson*: But where did he fall short at his greatest?

*Ciardi*: I'm not sure I understand your question.

*Bryson*: Well, at his top how was he short of the greatest?

*Ciardi*: When he was at his best, what was still wanting?

*Bryson*: Yes.

*Ciardi*: The difference between the minor poet and the major poet is not a matter of matching the peaks, it's a matter of sustaining the plateau.

*Bryson*: Staying there. That's a very interesting generalization, Mr. Ciardi. Would you say that about all great poets?

*Ciardi*: I think, for example, that Andrew Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress* is as good, line for line and troy weight for troy weight, as anything in the language.

*Davison*: Ah, now, wait a moment. I always remember Hilaire Belloc's saying what was wrong with so much of the poetry of this century, up to the time when he said this, which was in about 1921: "How many modern poets have even been able to get up onto a height and stay there for twenty lines?" It's a very good question. As a matter of fact, Tennyson was one of the few poets in the nineteenth century who did that again and again and again.

*Ciardi*: Well, it's another discussion. But I think if twenty lines is the criterion, we're flooded with gods for the Pantheon in the twentieth century.

*Davison*: Of course, I'm quoting another man; I would much prefer it to be two hundred lines, though even again that's dangerous. Swinburne wrote a poem called *Tristram of Lyonesse* which has been described by several excellent critics as a perfect poem. The trouble with it is that it rises to a very high level and stays there so monotonously that there's never any black or white in it. And we have a lot of poets like that nowadays, though they're nothing like as good as Swinburne. But I'd like to come back to the parody you've just read and the passage from *Balin and Balan*, because I don't really agree about that passage. I think "And the sand danced at the bottom of it" is a lovely line.

*Ciardi*: It's a lovely image, but I still think there's a kind of overly mellow pathos in the lady-fern and the dancing sand. It was Tennyson himself, as a matter of fact, who pointed out that a perfect line is not necessarily a line of poetry.

*Davison*: Here's a passage from *The Last Tournament*, one of the most famous passages in Tennyson:

. . . Arthur knew the voice; the face  
Wellnigh was helmet-hidden, and the name  
Went wandering somewhere darkling in his mind.  
And Arthur deign'd not use of word or sword,

*But let the drunkard, as he stretch'd from horse  
To strike him, overbalancing his bulk,  
Fall,*

And now listen:

*as the crest of some slow-arching wave,  
Heard in dead night along that table-shore,  
Drops flat, and after the great waters break  
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves,  
Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud,  
From less and less to nothing; thus he fell  
Head-heavy . . .*

You see, that is Tennyson — I would say at his very best, in a kind of Homeric simile. Now I think the point on which we could agree is this: that Tennyson spoiled a great deal of his best work because of his notebook habit. He would go around with a notebook in his pocket, and he'd observe that the buds of the aspen are gummy or that the underside of the willow leaf is white, or he would notice something like that "sand dancing in the bottom of the spring," and he'd make a note of it. Then, when he saw a convenient place to interpolate it in his poem he'd put it in. You get a great deal of unevenness as a result of that. The passages in themselves are good, but they stand out badly in contrast with what surrounds them.

*Ciardi:* Perhaps I'm wrong, perhaps I'm depraved with the twentieth century or whatever, but Tennyson was a poet of high seriousness and I think this in itself is a limitation.

*Bryson:* By "high seriousness" you don't mean concern with great themes, Mr. Ciardi?

*Ciardi:* Not necessarily. But he took himself too ponderously. The way a poet takes himself and the way the poet takes his subject are very much involved.

*Davison:* You mean he was too self-conscious?

*Ciardi:* He was too self-consciously serious. I am using the term that Cleanth Brooks uses when he distinguishes between the poets of high seriousness and the poets of wit. The poets of wit are ready to take the disparate elements of experience, they're willing to see life as a disjunction brought together. For example, Goldsmith objected to Homer's comparisons of Jason to an ass and of Ulysses to a broiled steak on the coals, because there was nothing noble, dignified, nor high about them. And I suspect Tennyson at all points of subscribing to Goldsmith's point of view that the thing must be high, it must be resonant, it must be sonorous. Supposing I have an experience that moves me as a human being but involves a louse: do I have to make this sonorous, do I have to play everything on the organ?

*Bryson:* Well, Burns didn't.

*Ciardi:* Exactly. But my point is that in the truly great poets, if we may take them as a measure, all orders of experience have their place. There is a limitation in all of Tennyson: certain orders of experience are not allowed into his poetic concern.

*Davison:* Well, I wonder . . .

*Ciardi*: Or they're so elevated that they stop being the kind of experience they were to start with.

*Davison*: But I don't think we ought to expect poets to conform to type. See, there's a problem here, and it's this: every poet, to some extent, writes in his own age, for his own age, as a man speaking to men in terms of his own age. One reason, perhaps, why so many of our poets today don't have a large audience is because they won't do that.

*Ciardi*: Exactly — because they have to speak *against* the age, which I think is sick of its own seriousness.

*Davison*: Shakespeare spoke against his own age, Milton spoke against his own age, Shelley spoke against his own age. But you must do it in the language of that age.

*Ciardi*: Do we get closer to it if we say that man must speak through his age?

*Bryson*: Through it?

*Ciardi*: Yes, not simply *to* it but *through* it — through it and beyond it.

*Davison*: Not just to please it, not just to gratify it, not just to make it feel comfortable and to confirm its prejudices. And Tennyson didn't do that, he didn't do that in *In Memoriam*.

*Ciardi*: Not at all, and I think at his best that he speaks *through* his age, to it and beyond it. I'm very much taken by Auden's *Selected Tennyson*. I'd like to recommend it to anyone.

*Davison*: So would I.

*Ciardi*: Because, like all poets who have written a great deal, Tennyson wrote a great deal that was bad and ponderous. Auden, with a very sharp perception, has selected what I think is truly the best of Tennyson.

*Davison*: I do think that, historically speaking, the Victorian age was an age between two worlds, as Tennyson said. At the beginning of it there'd been very little change in English life, in social conditions, in general ideas for several hundred years. At the end of it the whole world was changed. And we are the heirs of it, both here in America and in England. There was never a society so much, in a sense, in agreement with itself, in spite of the fact that under the surface all these quarrels and disputes were going on which resulted in our twentieth century. It was the last age in which one intelligent, informed man could talk to another and assume that the other man had the same kind of education, the same kind of general knowledge, the same kind of moral values that the speaker had. It's very difficult to blame those people when you look back over their age and see how very hard they were trying to make themselves understood and to improve—and I don't mean that word in any stuffy way—trying to improve the world in which they lived. Of course they made mistakes. Tennyson made many mistakes. He sometimes sounded exceedingly stuffy, but he was not essentially a stuffy man. Mr. Ciardi made a very important point: Tennyson was a brooding mystic, a man with a deep sorrow at his heart, and deep doubts.

*Bryson*: And because of that sorrow, he thought that change was going to bring into destruction all that he cared most about.

# WILLIAM M. THACKERAY

## *Pendennis*

(As broadcast February 19, 1956)

WILLIAM IRVINE • ERNEST J. SIMMONS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* *Pendennis* is not a novel that one generally associates Thackeray's greatness with, but in some ways it's a typical Victorian novel and a typical Thackeray novel. Perhaps that's a reason why it has dropped from our attention — it's *too* typical.

*Simmons:* I've been wondering why, unlike a number of the Victorians who have written great works, Thackeray has not been re-discovered by the reading public.

*Bryson:* You don't think there's any real vitality in these little spurts of interest in him now and then?

*Simmons:* Not too much. We have had, of course, a certain revival of interest in his life, in his letters which have recently been published, and in a biography which is coming out. But I suppose that we know Thackeray largely through *Vanity Fair* rather than through a novel such as *Pendennis*.

*Irvine:* *Pendennis* is perhaps his third best novel. But I think that it has the advantage of being written, in large part, with greater brevity and terseness than *Vanity Fair*, and that in considerable part it compares with so carefully done a work as *Henry Esmond*.

*Bryson:* You don't think that the demands of serial publication vitiated his methods so much here as they did in *Vanity Fair*?

*Irvine:* I think they did to a very great extent, though perhaps not in the early part of the novel. The Fotheringay episode seems to me to be managed with great economy and written in a very fine and high style of comedy.

*Bryson:* So it isn't just prolixity, wordiness, that makes this seem not quite our dish?

*Simmons:* Mr. Irvine, you mentioned a moment ago that it's written with terseness. I might say that this is perhaps a Victorian kind of terseness—not the kind of telegraphic style which we find so common in our novels today. Actually, this is a rather rambling novel, especially if you compare it with *Henry Esmond*.

*Bryson:* Rambling in structure?

*Simmons:* The kind of intrigue that he puts into the plot is sometimes rather difficult to follow. The story itself is simple enough: it's about Arthur Pendennis who has been left a small inheritance by his father.

*Bryson:* And Arthur goes through an experience very typical of these "novels of education" — the story of how you make a man, or at least a gentleman. They're so common a type, and they're nearly always rather rambling, aren't they?



*Simmons*: I think, on the whole, that Thackeray pretty much had in mind the eighteenth-century novel of the type that Fielding wrote. You note that this is called *The History of Pendennis*. Well, it is in every sense a history, because Thackeray follows his hero as he's growing up: he has an unfortunate love affair with a small-town actress by the name of Emily Fotheringay, who is eight years older than he is . . .

*Bryson*: Oh, she's *centuries* older than he is!

*Simmons*: I'm sure that Major Pendennis, Arthur's guardian, thought so. As a matter of fact, if I'm not mistaken, the Major said that of course no gentleman would marry a woman superior to him in age or inferior to him in position.

*Irvine*: And then young Pendennis goes to college. There he has an experience that reminds us a great deal of Thackeray's own life.

*Bryson*: That's a note which we have to get in right at the beginning: there is so much of Thackeray's own life in this book.

*Irvine*: To a great extent it is *The History of William Makepeace Thackeray*. In the novel Arthur goes to "Oxbridge," a combination of Oxford and Cambridge . . .

*Bryson*: You notice that they never go to "Camford"? They always go to Oxbridge — I've never quite understood why.

*Simmons*: This really is, wouldn't you say, a replica of Thackeray's own experiences at Trinity College, Cambridge?

*Irvine*: Quite right. But of course it does fit in, too, with Pendennis's own past career. He is a man of small property yet of such magnificent manners that he seems to be a good deal richer than he actually is. He becomes a kind of hero at the university. He is always going to do great things but he never does them, and while he is supposed to be doing great things he loses a lot of money at gambling — which parallels Thackeray's experience.

*Simmons*: He goes on to work out Thackeray's own notion, I take it, of what a gentleman ought to be. But I said that I thought the plot was rather rambling. You remember that Thackeray in rather characteristic fashion thinks nothing of breaking into the story with a remark such as "Well, now, Gentle Reader, let us pause for a moment while I tell you the hundred-year history of one of my characters." It is this kind of rambling, of course, that makes it difficult for one to follow the course of the story. But, nevertheless, one's interest in the plot itself never fails.

*Bryson*: I wonder whether we aren't just a bit self-conscious about rejecting asides and direct addresses to the reader? I find that, of the Victorians, Trollope is the one whose story always interests me most; the reality of his characters always seems to me so unmistakable and so inescapable, although of course his themes are not very profound or important. And yet Trollope is always saying "Well, Dear Reader, I'm going to surprise you" or "Now, Dear Reader, you didn't think I was going to say that, did you?" And it doesn't, to me, detract a bit. Am I just a Victorian in disguise?

*Simmons*: With Thackeray I think there's a purpose behind his particular method of fiction. Unlike modern novelists, he is not much concerned with what you might call internal psychological analysis.

*Bryson*: At least not overtly, not explicitly.

*Simmons*: Definitely not overtly. We learn about Thackeray's characters from what he, the author, says about them in his own person or what other characters happen to be saying about them.

*Bryson*: And from what they do.

*Simmons*: Yes, although what they do is not, I think, stressed as much in Thackeray's novels as it would be in the average novel of action.

*Irvine*: It means that Thackeray does see things from the outside. For example, his treatment of Pendennis's gambling at Oxbridge is quite superficial when you come right down to it. He simply says that Pendennis lost money. He doesn't explain the temptation of gambling, or what relationship gambling has to the character of young Pendennis. Think of what Dostoevsky has done with gambling!

*Bryson*: I was going to say, and I'm sure Mr. Simmons will back me up, that Dostoevsky had a good deal more personal experience with gambling than Thackeray had.

*Irvine*: Thackeray had quite a bit, though.

*Bryson*: But he didn't go at it with the Russian soul.

*Simmons*: No; and of course Dostoevsky's genius led him to believe that he had actually worked out a system to break the bank. Thackeray never had any such illusions.

*Bryson*: But, you know, the Dostoevsky comparison seems to me a valuable one — bowing always, Mr. Simmons, to your vastly superior knowledge of the Russian novelist — because some of the things which seem to us almost faults, or at least lacks, in Thackeray are brought more sharply into focus when we compare him with a man like Dostoevsky. I'm not sure that we should so easily dismiss Thackeray and say that obviously Dostoevsky is a greater man; he's a greater psychologist, but whether that makes him a greater novelist is quite a different question.

*Simmons*: Well, I would admit that Thackeray tells a yarn, a story, more entertainingly than Dostoevsky. But of course one of the lacks which not only I but, I think, most critics of Thackeray have discovered is a certain lack of spiritual content; a lack of the ability which you find in Dostoevsky to dramatize these great universal problems of good and evil.

*Bryson*: But becoming a gentleman isn't a great universal problem of good and evil, is it? That's what he was trying to show — the education of a gentleman. Can that be spiritualized?

*Irvine*: I think it can. I don't think that Thackeray did it here, but he came much closer to doing it in *Henry Esmond*. I do think he has said a number of important things about the gentleman.

*Simmons*: As a matter of fact, this is almost the only single, important problem that Thackeray came to grips with. I think Thackeray himself was a kind of gentleman among bohemians and a conservative among radicals. This is projected to a very considerable extent in *Pendennis*. His major problem here is to show how young Pendennis, in his travels through the world, in the knocks and misfortunes and hardships that come his way, finally learns to be the kind of gentleman that Thackeray thought he should be.

*Bryson*: Does that explain the question you proposed in the beginning, as to why we are not so much interested in Thackeray as his genius might indicate we should be? We aren't interested in how gentlemen are made?

*Simmons*: Nowadays it's one of the problems which our novelists, I think, tend to evade. In the Victorian period it was a very important problem, because the time had come when England had ceased, in a sense, to be an agricultural country and had become a commercial and manufacturing country.

*Bryson*: Which means that a lot of people had got rich quickly.

*Simmons*: It means that there were a lot of *nouveaux riches*, a lot of climbers who aspired to become members of the aristocracy. This was exactly the kind of would-be gentlemen that Thackeray was satirizing so prominently in *Pendennis* and particularly, of course, in the character of Major Pendennis.

*Irvine*: Yes, I think he was attempting to show how Arthur—after many hard knocks and after having very persistently and industriously pursued a course of extravagant folly—was finally chastened, became a genuine gentleman, and was properly rewarded by marriage to the ideal girl, Laura.

*Bryson*: A very submissive Victorian ideal!

*Irvine*: Yes. And I do think that his regeneration is rather mechanically managed.

*Simmons*: Wouldn't you say that the success or failure of young Pendennis depends pretty much on Thackeray's own conception of the gentleman? That great precept of what a gentleman should be, namely Major Pendennis—certainly one of the most brilliant characterizations of the book—said that a true gentleman must have a pedigree. But the major was also pretty much convinced that if money didn't go along with the pedigree you couldn't very easily be a gentleman. You may remember one place in the novel where he is discussing young Foker, whose father was not exactly a gentleman in the current sense of the word but who was the owner of a huge brewery. The Major says to Pendennis, giving him one of his lessons in how to be a proper Victorian gentleman: "Pen, my boy, after all, birth counts for something, but when a man's brewery brings him in fourteen thousand pounds a year, there's the man for me." Well, this emphasis upon money, which Pen accepts nearly all through until the very end, tends to distort his conception of what a gentleman should be; and I'm very much afraid that money entered into Thackeray's own conception of the gentleman.

*Bryson*: But aren't we rather impatient with that kind of thing nowadays? This desire to be just exactly "the right type" seems to me to be something that either we don't care about or we run away from. You suggested that our novelists evade this. Are you saying that we care, but aren't willing to admit it?

*Simmons*: We're not willing to admit it, I'm afraid. In a sense, though, over the last fifteen years America also has had a tremendously prosperous period not unlike that of the Victorian era. The climb to power through money is a very prevalent thing in American life today, and the desire to move from a lower class to a

higher by virtue of money resembles very closely a situation that existed in the Victorian period.

*Bryson*: Except for the pedigree, Mr. Simmons.

*Simmons*: Well, Americans never have paid any attention to pedigree. That's one of the accidents of the English class system. I think Thackeray himself, who really belonged to what you might call the shabby gentility of that period, aspired himself to a higher degree; I think he reflects that in his whole treatment of *Pendennis*.

*Irvine*: I think that's true. Money and pedigree—in fact, all the externals of the gentleman—are very important to Major *Pendennis*. That is probably the reason why he is set off against Helen *Pendennis*, Arthur's mother. She represents what is so often the other pull in Thackeray's world—the pull of the domestic hearth, of motherly tenderness, of other-worldly values. The Major represents the pull of worldly values. Of course, he does exhibit very great abilities in making the life of a bachelor on half-pay a kind of monumental project, but I feel that he does represent worldliness in general. I think, too, that Thackeray's own view of the gentleman suffers somewhat in that there seem to be no alternatives between these two—between motherly tenderness which doesn't have very much to do with the gentleman and, on the other hand, a rather worldly kind of attitude verging on snobbishness.

*Simmons*: Although Thackeray has had a great reputation for drawing famous female characters, such as Becky Sharpe and Beatrix Esmond, characters quite superior on the whole to his male characterizations, wouldn't you say that in *Pendennis* he signally fails with the women characters?

*Bryson*: You mean that Laura and Blanche Amory and Pen's mother are not up to Thackeray's standard?

*Simmons*: There's certainly not a single feminine character in *Pendennis*, in my opinion, who could compare with either Becky or with Beatrix.

*Bryson*: One of Thackeray's great traits of genius is his capacity to portray the minx.

*Simmons*: How do you spell that?

*Bryson*: M-i-n-x, not m-i-n-k-s—if it makes any difference. The tantalizing, beautiful, untrustworthy, ultimately wicked woman is what Thackeray is best at, but none of these characters you've named is that sort. Blanche Amory comes the closest to it, I think.

*Simmons*: I think Blanche Amory is very well done. I think that her preciosity, her sentimentality, her cruelty under the surface are extremely well handled. Particularly her stratagem of delivering major blows while making minor compliments . . .

*Bryson*: Which is a feminine stratagem and worthy of any minx, I suppose. But is Thackeray's concern with social gradations, social finesse, and so on—is that the limitation of Thackeray as a novelist? In reappraising him do we say that the great questions didn't stir him?

*Irvine*: Probably one reason why Thackeray hasn't been revived in our own day is that he did tend to evade the great problems of the Victorian era, its spiritual doubts, its fear of love, its fear of God or

the Devil, the effects of revolution—all these tremendous problems that bothered people in those days. I think that his primary concern—certainly in this novel—was with the gentleman. Perhaps the most adequate expression of that is given in Thackeray's own advice to the world in one of his poems, where he says:

*Who misses and who wins the prize,  
Go, lose or conquer, as you can.  
But if you fail or if you rise,  
Be each, pray God, a gentleman.*

*Simmons*: I think that is true. I think he is a novelist without strong opinions, without convictions. In general, it seems to me, his mood is fundamentally one of a rather sad pessimism and skepticism. I think he feels that the way of the world is inevitable, and that whatever he might do will not make very much difference.

*Bryson*: I should say in addition, however, that we are no longer very interested in novelists or humorists of manners—because the kind of society we've got doesn't set manners as such an important goal as it has been in more thoroughly structured and perhaps aristocratic societies, even if that aristocracy was decaying.

## WILLIAM MORRIS

### News from Nowhere

(*As broadcast February 26, 1956*)

ANNE FREMANTLE   •   ERIC LARRABEE   •   LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: William Morris was a typical Victorian in the sense that he hated nearly everything we have come to think of as Victorian. But I suppose his dislike was a bit more important than that of some of the others, because he had a profounder idea than they of what could be done to make life better than it was in Victorian times.

*Larrabee*: In this book he was dreaming about the future, perhaps a hundred years beyond the 1890s in which he was writing. And part of his fortune and misfortune, as may happen to a dreamer, is that the dream has come true—but in a way that surely would be very perplexing and disappointing to Mr. Morris if he were alive to see it.

*Fremantle*: Wouldn't you say that the dream came true by contraversion?

*Larrabee*: Yes. Reacting against the squalor and ugliness around him, he saw a future in which socialism—although perhaps it was a kind of esthetic socialism—had made not only life but the people who were living it beautiful.

*Bryson*: And good, Mr. Larrabee. He thought they would be both good *and* beautiful if they had a chance.

*Larrabee*: He thought that these two things went very closely together. His details of a world in which there is a great deal of spare time, in which people are free to pursue their own craftsman-like instinct, are not unlike some of the surroundings that we live in now. And yet our world has come about through a rejection of Morris's central idea, which was a hatred of the machine and a love of personal craftsmanship.

*Fremantle*: And it's funny that in everything he stood for he seems to have inherited the opposite. When I went to look for a copy of *News from Nowhere*, which is out of print and very hard to come by, I found it in the Fordham University library. But where did I find it? In a funny little corner, stacked up with Marx and Lenin and some of the Russian writers. Now if William Morris disliked anything, he disliked Marx. He was a passionate socialist, but when somebody said to him "You'd better read Marx," he said "Why should I read Marx? I'm perfectly well aware of the misery of the lower classes without having to read Marx; I just look around me." He was a very un-Marxian socialist.

*Bryson*: But what kind of socialism did he dream of? What was his idea?

*Fremantle*: I think his belief, as demonstrated in *News from Nowhere*, was that if you treated people right they would be nice. It was a slightly naïve idea, but he exemplified it in everything he did. If you gave people beautiful things, they would like them; if you taught them how to make lovely tiles and curtain fabrics, they would use them. And he's very emphatic about the clothes they wear: everyone is to be dressed in lovely silks, lovely stuffs.

*Larrabee*: Even the dustman.

*Bryson*: He was a great craftsman, a great thinker about these things, and a great poet. He was a very great man, Morris was, and the fact that some of his most important things are out of print is a curious comment on a world which is realizing his dream.

*Fremantle*: Some people don't even realize that he was a writer. They think of him only as a craftsman and designer. Well, he wrote twenty-four large, fat volumes.

*Bryson*: And was probably the best narrative poet of his time.

*Fremantle*: Also one of the best utopians. *News from Nowhere* isn't in a class with *Utopia* and *Erewhon*, but it's an exciting book to read by any token, and so is his *Backward Dream*—his historical look-back to medieval times, which was a kind of pendant to *News from Nowhere*.

*Bryson*: But how was he going to realize a world in which everybody, because of the social and economic arrangements of life, became both beautiful and good?

*Larrabee*: He seemed to feel that if you freed people of their exploitation, if you took away from them the surplus work that went to support an extra class, it would release the full productivity of their own individual powers, their own individual skills.

*Bryson*: There must be some truth in that.

*Larrabee*: Well, he doesn't seem to have thought very much about the total picture. You get the impression that the England he looks forward to is a place entirely removed from such problems as foreign trade; everyone has a sufficiency of everything. If he were to be confronted with today's socialist England, which in ways is another fulfillment of his dream, I'm sure he'd be horrified to see the terrible problems that confront people who have realized all of his ambitions.

*Fremantle*: I think that's a very good point: that he was, though he didn't want to be, a kind of isolationist. He didn't think of our One World at all. He made several trips to Iceland. It was the place he loved best and where he found much inspiration. He said, "I learned there that poverty doesn't matter as long as you don't have inequality." He thought that inequality was the worst thing in the world.

*Bryson*: Isn't that more the poet's than the socialist's idea? And isn't his love of Iceland more his love of how it looked to him than his understanding of how it felt to the people who lived there? He loved to translate the Icelandic sagas, of course, and did it better than anybody else had ever done. But I may be expressing a slight prejudice against utopian thinkers who believe that if the world was only the way *they* would like to have it, then everybody would be happy.

*Fremantle*: And I think G. K. Chesterton put his finger on it very well when he said that Morris was perfectly happy with a world of flat goodness and flat people, where there were no unexplored depths of either hope or despair.

*Larrabee*: Yes, I would agree with that. I think Morris is almost an esthetic socialist. He is against the going system of his time, against it in all-out terms. He speaks of his society as "vicious to the core." But he is against it on grounds very like those which led him to design furniture and fabrics and wallpaper: this kind of society made people ugly, made things ugly. And in his rejection of this society the same esthetic instinct is operating as in his other works. I think they're very much of a piece.

*Bryson*: But how did he reconcile himself to the fact, as we know, that in his craftsmanship he was very successful commercially? Because the things he designed were sold as luxury goods. He didn't produce beauty for the people, he produced beauty for the rich.

*Larrabee*: I think you would have to say that he never did quite reconcile himself to this.

*Bryson*: You mean that Morris himself was unhappy about it?

*Larrabee*: I should doubt that. I think he was a very happy craftsman. He loved his work. But I think he must have felt that he had failed essentially to solve the problem of providing his kind of goods for as many people as he wanted to. He wanted everyone to be William Morris, which is a heavy assignment, certainly.

*Bryson*: But a pretty constant standard for utopian thinkers, Mr. Larrabee.

*Fremantle*: G. K. Chesterton, once again, said that Morris, "in bringing back to us the fairy tales and the sagas, made a magnificent contribution, but he failed himself in making one fairy tale come

true." In the fairy tale of *Beauty and the Beast*, Beauty loves the Beast and kisses him: that is the point of the story. Morris didn't love his nineteenth-century world and didn't attempt to embrace it; he attempted to go forward, away from it, into some utopian future or backwards into medieval England.

*Larrabee*: Yes, and both at once—in the sense that he couldn't love the Crystal Palace and couldn't love the industrial goods around him and couldn't love steam engines. He had to oppose to them the only dream that the nineteenth century provided him with, which was a dream of medieval sincerity and closeness to the soil and closeness to the work object at hand. And so, at the very moment when he was providing the twentieth century with the means for escaping from the nineteenth, he was unable himself to escape.

*Bryson*: But you said that in a way we had justified his dream and in another way we had lost it. He hated the Beast—which is the machine, I suppose—and, failing to love it, couldn't turn it into a fairy prince. But have we turned it into one?

*Larrabee*: We've come quite a long way. Even the schools of architecture and design that are vigorously opposed to one another are both grandchildren of William Morris. Take, for instance, the polarity between Gropius and Frank Lloyd Wright. Both of them have an almost direct line of descent. Gropius derives from the *Bauhaus* and the *Werkbund* in Germany, people who accepted Morris's ideas about the usefulness of objects, about making furniture that was simple and, in his terms, honestly functional, and who then, making the slight adjustment to the machine that Morris had not wanted to make, developed the International style of buildings and furniture. Opposed to them is Frank Lloyd Wright, who took, say, the other side of Morris, the rather romantic ideas about craftsmanship and the strong allowance for a kind of lushness in life, and who descends from Morris by way of his unhappy American imitator, Elbert Hubbard. Here are both of these people, who have made the world of design which now surrounds us by taking a part of Morris—but by violating his essential idea.

*Fremantle*: Although Morris wasn't able to give us the solution which he foresaw—so often the prophet can't help himself—and though we think of him perhaps as one of those sturdy, bear-like characters that fill the Victorian scene as they do Yellowstone Park, yet I do think that he would have approved of the results. His one idea was to make life as pleasant for other people as it had been for him, and he was a very happy person. I think you get a lovely feeling of how much he liked people and how beautiful he thought the world. It's almost the Renaissance joy in the beauty of things.

*Bryson*: I suppose nobody else has ever made socialism so much of an esthetic dream. Well, now, suppose Morris were alive again and walked into present-day America: would he be happy here?

*Larrabee*: I think he would be, first of all, extremely perplexed; whether he would decide that he was happy with the result, I have no idea. I think he would have a very hard time swallowing our solution, but at the same time you certainly must say of Morris that he thought a great deal about problems which were then only on the



distant horizon, and which we can hardly say we've done any better with than he did. He thought a great deal, for example, about the relationship between work and play, which now troubles us.

*Bryson*: And which we're beginning to try to do something about.

*Larrabee*: Yes, in the sense which he foresaw. In *News from Nowhere* he is posing the existence of a society in which everyone enjoys his work, in which there is no pressure to do anything which you dislike; in which each craftsman is so satisfied with producing an object or doing his work that he has no worry about being paid. Money has disappeared, and individuals compete with each other not for the fruits of their work but for the right to work itself.

*Bryson*: And our answer to that is the assembly line!

*Larrabee*: Well, in creating the assembly line, which was only a bad dream to Morris, we have brought about a situation in which we have to worry about the same things *he* worried about.

*Fremantle*: He also was prophetic if you consider all this do-it-yourself enthusiasm—everybody making his own pottery, building his own kitchen, and so on.

*Bryson*: The whole trend toward amateur participation in the arts is a good Morris idea.

*Fremantle*: I think he'd be very happy if he came to America and found housewives cutting out their own dresses and making the tiles for their own bathrooms. I think he'd be pleased about it.

*Bryson*: There's a philosophic problem here that Morris didn't solve and I wonder if we've thought our own way through it. To Morris, work could be made a joy. We've gone through a period in which work was regarded as a curse, in which we thought we should get out of it as soon as possible and enjoy our leisure. Now, in our leisure, we find that what we want to do is another kind of work.

*Fremantle*: I think Morris foresaw that. In *News from Nowhere* there is no distinction between work and leisure.

*Larrabee*: It seems to me that toward the end of the book they go looking for work as we would go on a vacation. There is a trip up the Thames on a hay-making expedition which is described with all the affection one might feel for a country party. What they're going for is simply to work in the fields, but you feel that he has almost put in his reservation for this hay ride.

*Bryson*: We do that, too, Mr. Larrabee. We go off on camping trips, we put ourselves up to quite unnecessary and fantastic hardships in the name of vacation sport, don't we?

*Larrabee*: Quite true.

*Bryson*: It's a very deep American habit to think you have to go out and rough it every so often in order to be happy. But I think the question that I would always ask of Morris is whether or not he realized the enormous capacity of man for expanding his wants. He thought people would be content with beauty. Well, people *aren't* content with beauty alone. They want more beautiful things, they want more comfort. Now, is this just a weakness, a degradation of the spirit, or is it something we should try to satisfy?

*Larrabee*: I don't know. I think you would say from *News from Nowhere* that Morris's wants were easily satisfied. He gives a sense

of having relatively simple but precise demands. He likes a kind of wholesomeness in food and in clothing and in building; beyond that, he seems not to want much more.

*Fremantle*: Do you remember the very last page? Ellen, the girl he falls in love with, sends him back to the horrors of Hammer-smith, and says: "No, it will not do. You cannot be of us. You belong so entirely to the unhappiness of the past that our happiness even would weary you." You have a hint of that earlier in the book when the sour, grumpy old man whom they meet says: "Well, in the old days I used to like Thackeray's books. Why don't they like books like that nowadays?" You have the feeling that Morris knew there was more to life.

*Larrabee*: Yes.

*Fremantle*: And yet he couldn't face the fact of original sin, couldn't face the fact that human beings have this essential flaw in them. I think, Mr. Bryson, that's what you mean: unending want is part of our discontent; it may be divine or it may be devilish, but it's part of our nature.

*Bryson*: Well, we taught it to ourselves; it's there.

*Larrabee*: Doesn't Chesterton's stricture on him, which Mrs. Fremantle was quoting before, apply to him as an artist rather than as a thinker? He imagined this dream. He was producing something rather thin, and as he came to the end of the book, something must have told him that there was some element missing. You have the feeling as he rounds it off that his doubts are beginning to rush in on him.

*Fremantle*: And that, I think, is why William Morris is a great writer and why this is a great book. He was a great artist, and the artist can never be satisfied; he can never really even imagine a satisfactory world, because even as he imagines it he thinks of something new. He has to go on creating.

*Bryson*: Would there be any artist in a satisfactory world, Mrs. Fremantle?

*Larrabee*: Everyone would be an artist!

*Bryson*: Then there wouldn't be any. I mean that quite seriously. If you didn't depend on what you call original sin, Mrs. Fremantle—I'm quite willing to call it by that name—if you didn't have the incurable evil or the incurable aggression or the incurable dissatisfaction in human nature would you ever have any artists?

*Fremantle*: I think you would not. I agree that it's the *felix culpa*, the happy fault. I think that perhaps the lack of it in William Morris is what Chesterton meant when he said that he didn't understand the unexplored and explosive possibilities of human nature, the unnameable terrors and the nameable hopes.

*Larrabee*: Yes. He didn't seem to recognize that one could bring about this paradise of his and that still people could be unhappy, still the human spirit could be warped.

*Bryson*: He cared more for beauty than he cared for goodness, happiness, comfort, equality, or anything else. When you say that we have in a way realized his dream, do you mean to say that we have made the kind of beauty he loved available to most people?

*Larrabee*: In a way which, as I was saying, he wouldn't accept. He did not believe that you could take a beautiful object and reproduce it in thousands or millions of copies by machine and still have the same object—because to him the object was what the craftsman made, and loved, with his hands.

*Bryson*: It had to have his own fingerprints on it.

*Larrabee*: It must—to be what Morris wanted it to be. I don't believe, were he confronted with our world today, that he could ever accept the idea that all of these automobiles are beautiful (even in the rare instances where they actually are), could believe that they gave the satisfaction that he demanded. I am of the Devil's party—which I take to be your party, Mr. Bryson—and I think he was wrong.

*Fremantle*: The only decent hat he ever had, his opera hat, he once sat on—and never wore one again. I think that perhaps he sat on a great many hats and squashed them flat, those Victorian hats. He was a real rebel, and I think that his prophetic quality is what we must admire him for and admire his book for.

*Bryson*: But can you hang on to a man's aims and ideals if you have rejected his means?

*Fremantle*: I think so.

*Bryson*: That's what we have to decide, isn't it, in regard to Morris?

*Larrabee*: I think you can admire the passion with which he rejected the ugliness in the world around him; I think you can certainly admire the pure effort of creative imagination which brought him abreast of our own difficulties; and I think you can certainly learn something from his attitude toward work and play. If we could only do half well as Morris did, I should be very content.

*Bryson*: I suppose he's an example of those poets who are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. I've often thought that if they ever were acknowledged, they'd cease to be very useful as legislators—because then we'd have to accept their scheme as well as their dream. In Morris's case we kept the dream but we threw away his method of getting at it. Is that right?

*Larrabee*: That's quite right.

*Fremantle*: I think the proof of the pudding is in the eating. We are all inheritors of Morris's prophecies; we have made them come true while we've forgotten Morris himself.

*Bryson*: Well, we must try to remember him.

# JOHN RUSKIN

## *Sesame and Lilies*

(As broadcast March 4, 1956)

LEO GURKO • DAVID A. ROBERTSON JR. • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* In many ways Ruskin demands reappraisal, re-examination and re-evaluation more than most of the great Victorian figures because I think his reputation has declined more than most of them. *Sesame and Lilies* was a direct attack upon what he thought was wrong with his own time, and his ideas of how it could be made better.

*Robertson:* Don't you think the first thing we must say about *Sesame and Lilies* is that here Ruskin was speaking an eloquent "invitation to learning"?

*Bryson:* I suppose he was, or at least an invitation to reading—which was his first subject; he didn't stick to it.

*Gurko:* His ideas on reading express some of his most characteristic attitudes. And one of the reasons why this book is as good a place as any to examine Ruskin's influence and importance is that we see not simply *his* ideas on the subject, but also the ideas and thinking of many of his Victorian contemporaries.

*Bryson:* The things that he wanted to cure if he could—because you never can see Ruskin as anything but an eloquent reformer, can you?

*Gurko:* No. As a reformer, his chief interest was to instruct and to improve his audience; his attitude throughout *Sesame and Lilies* is that he has the absolutely right blueprint for everybody's reading list and for the improvement of everybody's mind.

*Bryson:* And always improving their minds *morally*, wasn't he?

*Gurko:* Well, both morally and esthetically.

*Bryson:* Oh, yes. But his esthetics reek with morality.

*Gurko:* By the time he wrote *Sesame and Lilies* in 1865 this, of course, was true. But when we think back on the development of his ideas, we notice that he comes first to the world around him, with an eye to its beauties, and then he establishes lines of communication between the esthetic impulse and the moral one.

*Robertson:* This didacticism is most apparent in the special manner of the second part of *Sesame and Lilies*, the one called *Of Queen's Gardens*. Surely most of us nowadays would find that Ruskin was showing something fairly close to arrogance in his treatment of the moral education of women.

*Gurko:* Well, his attitude toward women is one of the things we associate with the word "Victorian."

*Bryson:* Let's not rush into his attitude toward women just yet, although it's a tempting subject. I'd first like to know more about his attitude toward reading. What kind of reading did he want

us to do in order to improve our morals and our appreciation of beauty?

*Gurko*: Well, he's primarily concerned with prescribing books that have a high and civilized cultural content. This is why he is so suspicious of novels, and at one point in *Sesame and Lilies* asks "How much novel-reading should be allowed?" The very use of the expression "should be allowed" is an indication of his whole prescriptive attitude toward it, and his conclusion is that the modern magazine and the novel ought to be kept for the most part out of the way of young female readers. Reading is to him a lofty, solemn, serious, and, I'm afraid, at times rather deadly business.

*Bryson*: Particularly for female readers.

*Robertson*: In whom we are to find all the qualities of goodness and tenderness and beauty, but few of the qualities of interestingness that most of us would like to discover nowadays. The education of women is to go only far enough to enable them to help their menfolk. Like Tennyson, Ruskin seems to be asking that men and women be "yoked in all exercise of noble end," but the education of women is never to be a matter of knowledge for its own sake.

*Gurko*: And he speaks of women as being "by their office and place" protected from all danger and temptation. In setting up reading lists for them he's going to make absolutely sure that they're protected from danger and temptation.

*Bryson*: Well, does he care what men read?

*Gurko*: Less so. Men are rougher creatures and presumably can stand the buffetings and the texture of the rude world outside in a way that women cannot.

*Bryson*: But there's no idea here, is there, that men, having to live in the rude world outside and take its buffetings, should be toughened by some acquaintance, vicariously, with evil and tragedy?

*Gurko*: Well, they're inevitably in contact with the evil and the tragedy of the world.

*Bryson*: But he doesn't want them to get that in books.

*Gurko*: He wants to protect them from that in books, and he looks upon women as the main protecting agency—to keep men's sensibilities refined and prevent them from sinking into the brutish state.

*Robertson*: It's almost as if he'd been seeing quite too much of the polite young ladies at a girl's school and not enough of the mature, clever women of the 1860s, the ones who were carrying forward the campaign for higher education for women.

*Gurko*: He isn't really talking about flesh and blood women. The women who appear in his books and to whom he addresses himself are really creatures of his fantasy, his imagination. They're pure pedestalled abstractions. And we note in this connection his early life, during the course of which he was dominated by the overwhelming personality of his mother . . .

*Bryson*: That's a very modern comment, of course; that's twentieth century.

*Gurko*: As well as his unhappy and unsuccessful relations with Adèle Domecq and Charlotte Lockhart and his six-year marriage to

Euphemia Gray, which was a notoriously unhappy and unconsummated affair. Ruskin, in his comments on women and his attitude toward them, shrank from treating them as full-blown human beings existing in a world of reality. We must look upon his ideas about the education of women as representing not simply the idealizing fantasies of the Victorian age, but also as representing something from the personal experiences of his own private life.

*Bryson*: I wonder if you gentlemen realize what an extremely unpleasant picture you're painting of a man who is often thought of as one of the greatest writers of English prose, and certainly one of the greatest reformers of the nineteenth century? Is it his stuffiness and, from our point of view, completely unrealistic attitude toward women that makes him so unsympathetic to the modern reader?

*Robertson*: Not altogether that, surely. Most of us, I daresay, would find him positively wrong in a good many of his beliefs.

*Bryson*: Not only about women?

*Robertson*: I think many of us find his criticism of painting, for example, difficult to accept.

*Bryson*: And art was his chief interest, wasn't it?

*Robertson*: He began with art, in *Modern Painters*, in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, in *The Stones of Venice*. It's interesting that just one hundred years ago, in March of 1856, one of the mature, clever women whom he couldn't really tolerate . . .

*Bryson*: Or believe in.

*Robertson*: . . . or believe in, wrote a devastating review of *Modern Painters*, criticizing his central argument that a picture should, as she put it, convey a moral rather than simply be a good picture.

*Gurko*: While we're speaking of *Modern Painters*, let's say something about the permanent and the important and the attractive sides of Ruskin's ideas.

*Bryson*: Do you mean that in spite of a fundamental esthetic mistake—or would you reject the idea that it's a mistake—he still has a lot of good to say about art and architecture? Certainly he interested thousands of people in it who had never been interested before.

*Gurko*: More than that: he educated the tastes of the rising industrial middle class of his time to a real interest in the world of nature and of beauty around them. And when we consider Ruskin's ideas about painting and architecture, the one thing that we note almost immediately is that what is of durable importance about them is not his comment on this painter or that, or his preference of the Gothic Middle Ages to the baroque and sensuous Renaissance. What is of interest about them is that in *Modern Painters*, in chapter after chapter, he is writing not about specific painters or schools of painting at all; he's writing about the beauties of trees and the loveliness of cloudscapes. His real interest is in educating the English eye, the unesthetic and unbeautiful and unaware English eye.

*Robertson*: Even Geoffrey Scott in *The Architecture of Humanism* conceded that Ruskin awakened men to look at buildings in the same fashion. He did make people look; but, at the same time,

don't you believe that he was standing outside what now seems to have been the main stream in the history of criticism? Wasn't he stressing ornament rather than function in architecture? Wasn't he advocating precisely ideas that we find uncongenial?

*Bryson*: What would he do if he walked today on Park Avenue in New York or Michigan Avenue in Chicago, and saw these great glass-walled slabs of buildings that have almost no ornament on them at all?

*Gurko*: He would be, of course, horrified and outraged.

*Robertson*: Mere builders made these, I should think he'd say.

*Bryson*: They are not "architectural" because they have no ornament on them.

*Robertson*: They lack interest in sculpture, they lack interest in painting.

*Gurko*: Nevertheless, because Ruskin lived and because he wrote—regardless of what we seem to think to be the doctrinal wrongness of many of his judgments—because he lived and wrote people today are more aware, pro or con, of the kind of architecture that we're creating in our own time.

*Bryson*: Although I don't like Ruskin—his spirit is not congenial to mine at all—I think that I would restate what you said to give him a little more credit. After all, they were never lacking in England for people who looked at painting and looked at architecture. There have been long periods of noble building and noble collections, and even great painters. What he did was not only to make people *look* more, he made *more* people look. He was a great educator of the general populace in these things; he spread into deeper and deeper layers of English life a sensitivity to these things. And that, I think, was his great cultural contribution.

*Gurko*: Which is exactly why his individual judgments are of relatively trivial account in reassessing Ruskin as a force for good or bad.

*Bryson*: He democratized the feeling for art and beauty and nature in England.

*Robertson*: Yes. The awakening force of Ruskin was heard, too, in the field of government, in the field of society.

*Gurko*: Well, we must remember that when Ruskin appeared upon the scene, the industrial revolution was already thirty or forty years old.

*Bryson*: And at its worst?

*Gurko*: In its earliest and most hideous phases; the tradition of art and of beauty had by then dwindled into the hands of a few isolated figures. What Ruskin did was to reawaken what in earlier times had been pretty much the general sensibility of the English population. One reason why he spent so much time in indignant tirades against the ugliness and the materialism of the factory age, why he spent so much time talking about the relations between art and society, is that he felt that it was because of the industrial revolution that the sense of beauty was, to a large degree, atrophied in his own day.

*Robertson*: He did not want England to become, as he put it,

the Man in the Iron Mask. The beauty of the countryside he wished very much to preserve. Would it be fair, do you think, to say that he induced men and women to question what he called "the *soi-disant* science of political economy" which "founds an ossifant theory of progress on . . . negation of the soul"? He led men to question here as he had led men to question in looking at buildings. And would it be fair to say further, I wonder, that he wanted to make all men work for happiness and beauty; he wanted to cultivate a sort of heroism of production within society; he wanted all to enjoy beauty and happiness?

*Gurko*: Well, he was in an ivory tower—a dreamer, a theoretician. The million dollars that he inherited from his father he put into one of those little utopian colonies that kept turning up in the nineteenth century. He tried to work out in terms of agriculture and political economy his own ideas about the restoration of the healthy and happy relationship that should always exist between the individual worker and the commodity he devotes the best part of his time to.

*Robertson*: And in one of the most eloquent passages in *Sesame and Lilies*, Ruskin's energy and imaginative power reach a characteristic climax. He speaks of England in a kind of prophetic way. He says "a nation cannot last as a money-making mob: it cannot with impunity . . . go on despising literature, despising science, despising art, despising nature, despising compassion, and concentrating its soul on Pence." Here is one of the noble aspects of the Victorian age, in terms of its liberal and aroused social conscience, in terms of its desire to make the world a better place for everybody. And in this sense, Ruskin is, of course, one of the great nineteenth-century prophets.

*Gurko*: He was an *awakener*, wasn't he? No matter what his own thoughts, the stimulus that he provided was of extraordinary value. One has reservations, of course; he kept working outside the main stream.

*Bryson*: Quite right. His power to awaken men to the evils of unrestrained industrialism is to some degree tainted by rather fanciful theories about how these evils could be remedied. He had a kind of milk-and-water socialism, which was neither the liberalism of the time nor the stronger socialism which was emerging elsewhere. It was a sort of esthetic socialism.

*Robertson*: Indeed it was; and you remember that even his devoted follower, Octavia Hill, a strong and clever woman, pointed out at last that he had no real sense of what was practical.

*Bryson*: Perhaps not. He didn't have even the kind of concrete impracticality that William Morris had. After all, Morris knew what he wanted men to do with their fingers. Ruskin only wanted them to work.

*Robertson*: Morris, indeed, went out and did it.

*Bryson*: Did it himself and showed how it could be done; made a lot of money at it too, somewhat to his chagrin. And I think that what's wrong with Ruskin is all of a piece, just as what's right with him is. He never could see the thing as it was: he always saw architecture as ornament, he saw reform as a kind of lovely dream, he



saw evil but had no real vision of the good in any aspect of his thought. He just had this tremendous rousing eloquence that got everybody excited.

*Gurko*: Mr. Bryson, I should take issue with you there.

*Bryson*: Do, by all means!

*Gurko*: One thing which he saw very clearly, and which he continued to see very clearly to the end of his life, was the face and the forms of nature. His descriptions of trees, his descriptions of the passage of clouds over the heavens, his accounts of rain and meteorology—all these were superb.

*Bryson*: He was a great writer about nature—he was a great writer in any case, but he saw nature. I agree.

*Robertson*: Careful, similarly, in his drawings of trees. The sketches show a painstaking, loving attention to the real growth of the branches, the way they emerge from the trunk.

*Bryson*: Should he have been an artist?

*Robertson*: He was a fairly good draftsman.

*Bryson*: Yes, but not an artist in the real sense?

*Gurko*: He himself was conscious of his own inadequacy there.

*Bryson*: No, what I mean is that his temperament perhaps might have expressed itself more successfully if he'd had some of the kinesthetic skill that makes the great artist.

*Gurko*: But his great and acknowledged influence on such a person as William Morris did leave its main impression on English socialism as we understand it in the twentieth century. Isn't one of the great differences between English socialism and Continental socialism that the former has one of its main roots in the Middle Ages, in the whole esthetic tradition, in the whole idea of beauty—which Ruskin was one of the first to summon in the middle of the nineteenth century? And though he may not have been practical or, as you gentlemen have indicated, in the main stream—as though being in the main stream always is necessarily a virtue—nevertheless his influence upon the ideas and the attitudes of the more practical men to come was so strong that it was acknowledged to the end of their lives as well.

*Robertson*: Yes, I think just about fifty years ago a canvass showed that *Unto This Last* occurred on a great many lists of favorite books prepared by members of the Labor party in England.

*Bryson*: I think that something very important is beginning to emerge about Ruskin: although he was an impractical socialist and a bad economist, you can't credit him *only* with eloquence. You can credit him with having been one of the major forces in giving the socialist reform movement in Britain, right down into our own day, its esthetic, its intellectual quality. Whereas the socialists on the Continent so often seem to be after comfort and nothing else, socialism in England has always included the ideal of a beautiful life for people as well as a comfortable one.

*Gurko*: Ruskin addressed himself to what is, after all, the greatest theme of literature and philosophy: what constitutes happiness, and how can happiness be attained? He arrived at his own theory of how happiness can be attained. This was one of the char-

acteristic theories of the Victorian age. His critique of the industrial age was that by the introduction of the machine between the individual worker and the commodity itself, the fundamental liaison between man and his external world was broken; this was what resulted in the personally dehumanizing process of the industrial revolution. Now we may not like his doctrine, but we must concede that he asks all the great and fundamental questions.

*Robertson*: To Ruskin the importance of Gothic was that Gothic ornament was very closely in touch with nature; the Gothic workman was his own designer; he carried through the whole job from beginning to end, enjoying a special kind of happiness.

*Gurko*: This is why Ruskin always regarded the Middle Ages and the handicraft system as morally superior to the industrial age.

*Robertson*: It mattered not whether the work be absolutely perfect; perfection was, indeed, a disadvantage. One didn't want to have all the ornaments on the side of a church exactly alike. There is individuality in imperfections, and the imperfections therefore are good.

*Bryson*: I suppose, gentlemen, that all you can ask of a reformer is that he be eloquent and, to use your word, Mr. Robertson, an "awakener." But I think we have to regard Ruskin as a great force rather than as a writer whom we need to go back to and read for his own sake.

## OSCAR WILDE

### *The Importance of Being Earnest*

(As broadcast March 11, 1956)

JOHN MASON BROWN • MAURICE DOLBIER • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: Not many writers of high comedy could demand re-appraisal, because most of them go down the drain with time. I suppose there isn't anything else as rare as a high comedy that persists as classic, but *The Importance of Being Earnest* both for reading and for acting still does. There must be some reason.

*Dolbier*: Mr. Wilde put his finger on the reason, I think, when he wrote—in this very play, as a matter of fact—"In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing." Style lasts; I think perhaps sincerities vary with the centuries.

*Bryson*: Sincerities are just ephemeral and style is the granitic, everlasting element in human life?

*Dolbier*: I think Mr. Wilde would have said so, and I think he has made a point with *The Importance*.

*Brown*: I think none of us can question his style and his triumph

in the case of this play. Perhaps Wilde objected to sincerity not only because it, like everything else, can find period expression, but because he had been unsuccessful when he attempted to write plays where emotions were taken with some seriousness.

*Dolbier*: Well, Mr. Brown, was *Lady Windermere's Fan*, was *A Woman of No Importance*, was *An Ideal Husband* unsuccessful?

*Brown*: I mean unsuccessful from the point of view of lasting. Nowadays the paradox—a Wildean paradox—of those three earlier plays is that the only thing you can take seriously is the laughter; their funniest aspects are the supposedly serious scenes. Wilde, in the earlier plays—as so many English dramatists at that time—seems to have been borrowing wholesale from the French problem plays of Scribe and Augier and Dumas *filis*. The sentimental scenes are almost unendurable, and the emotional scenes are really funny; they have to be cut to protect the play against laughter that is unintended.

*Bryson*: How could a man who is otherwise funny unintentionally suddenly become, just by wit and farcical structure, the author of one of the greatest comedies in the English language?

*Brown*: If you go back to *A Woman of No Importance* or *Lady Windermere's Fan*, the perversity there is that most of us think of them as comedies, even now, because they have the same brilliance of epigram and of phrasing that *An Ideal Husband* has. But in *An Ideal Husband* Wilde turned away from the serious play—the problem here is only a farcical problem—and treats it in a comedic manner.

*Bryson*: And after *An Ideal Husband* he goes on to *The Importance of Being Earnest* and finds, at last, the thing he can do best?

*Brown*: This was his release into what is a supreme contribution to the theatre. The others are brilliant from the point of view of dialogue and the Wildean devices of speech, but unsuccessful—I go back to that word “unsuccessful”—from the point of view of an abiding expression of emotion that can be taken seriously.

*Dolbier*: Well, the other plays—the other comedies, we call them now—might have been written by other adequate playwrights. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is, I think, a unique example of high comedy in world literature. There's no other play that I can think of that matches it.

*Brown*: Well, the other plays, really have the qualities—plot-wise, structural-wise, themewise—of *East Lynne* as rewritten by Congreve. That's a very difficult combination, and the triumph is that they last as well as they do.

*Bryson*: I can't imagine anything funnier than *East Lynne* written by Congreve, except perhaps *East Lynne* written by its original author and played straight.

*Brown*: We've all seen spoof revivals of serious plays, *Ten Nights in a Barroom* and what have you, but Wilde did not mean to spoof the sentimental sections of his earlier plays. Unfortunately, his genius did not lie in the realm of seriously conveyed emotions.

*Bryson*: What did he do in this play?

*Dolbier*: What he did here was to write brilliantly about the genial idiocies of the high civilization of his time.

*Bryson*: The late Victorian, or shall we say the nascent Edwardian era?

*Dolbier*: I think nascent Edwardian is much closer.

*Bryson*: This is 1895, isn't it?

*Dolbier*: 1895, yes, shortly before the Boer War. This, I think, can be said: for permanence you can't successfully combine two styles in one play. *An Ideal Husband*, *A Woman of No Importance*, and the others have the high comedy that we associate with *The Importance of Being Earnest*. They also have the sentimental scenes that have changed their values in the period since. But *The Importance of Being Earnest* is written in one key and on one very high level and in one style, which is a fairly permanent style.

*Brown*: May I say I'm delighted to have Mr. Dolbier mention the Boer War? I don't want to get too grave and too *Middletown* about this, but I have long been of the opinion that if you lost all the other documents of this particular period—I mean from the nineties right down to our own times—and if you had left only the comedies of Wilde, Maugham, and Noel Coward, you could still reconstruct from them the changed values of England. Now, England before the Boer War—at the moment of the glorious nonsense of *The Importance of Being Earnest* . . .

*Bryson*: So much nonsense that there isn't even any use in trying to tell the plot of it.

*Brown*: Oh, it's really W. S. Gilbert without songs—because the dialogue doesn't need music; the wit is the music. But let me go back: this is an entrenched society before its certainties and assumptions were shaken by the Boer War, and it has all the arrogance of three hundred years of prosperity and privilege. It's a compartmented society, and the play gives, I think, a perfectly fascinating picture of what were its values.

*Dolbier*: Wilde himself was entrenched, powerful, and arrogant at the period when he wrote it.

*Brown*: He was felled at the moment of his success, but he was entrenched, oh yes.

*Bryson*: It was just before the disaster to him, and just before the first disaster to the British Empire.

*Dolbier*: Well, the British Empire had a little longer stay of execution.

*Bryson*: The Boer War hurt it, however. The first real hurt.

*Brown*: The people in this atmosphere—the special nascent Edwardian atmosphere, as you call it—are always of the nobility or related to the nobility. And this is the day when society, this high society, made possible the special values or lack of values which lie behind half of the fun of this brilliant farce comedy.

*Bryson*: When young men who got hungry thought that cucumber sandwiches would satisfy them.

*Brown*: Well, they did if they hoped to marry someone rich enough to pay up their debts for old cucumber sandwiches. They would have been ashamed of being taken seriously: I go back to your first quotation. Their epigrams are brilliant and endless, though sometimes wearing because there are so many of them. But there is a

spiritual yawn behind every epigram (which is part of his fun), there's a kind of world-weariness which is overexposure to the great world. That is the pose they maintain. Each of these characters would consider it a sin to take himself seriously or to have others do so.

*Dolbier*: If I may bring the conversation around circuitously to one of Mr. Brown's favorite writers, there was another young man at the time, a playwright, who might have been satisfied with cucumber sandwiches and who really needed them—a man named Bernard Shaw. He was at the time a dramatic critic but he had been writing plays . . .

*Brown*: He had begun writing plays.

*Bryson*: He lived so long that he seems to us almost to belong to a different era, but, of course, he *does* go back to this period.

*Brown*: Mr. Dolbier, may I interrupt for just one moment? You said "another young man"; may I say another young British writer who, therefore, was Irish?

*Dolbier*: Yes.

*Brown*: And witty.

*Dolbier*: Shaw, among his duties, had to review *The Importance of Being Earnest* and was not impressed. He did say that it was poorly performed. But about the play itself he said: "It amused me, of course. But unless comedy touches me as well as amuses me, it leaves me with a sense of having wasted my evening." He also called it a "mechanical rabbit" and went on with a host of adjectives: "immature, inhuman, old fashioned, funny, but hateful."

*Brown*: Well, may I instantly rush in? Not to defend Shaw, but to oppose two approaches to comedy. In one of the most famous definitions—and I hate definitions—in English literature, William Hazlitt said he defined high comedy as being "the eloquence of indifference." Wilde's wit is that. Shaw's wit is the strangest thing in the comic tradition.

*Dolbier*: Crusading wit.

*Brown*: It is the eloquence of caring, expressed in terms of laughter.

*Bryson*: And is that why Shaw didn't like Wilde? This is a puzzling and complicated business, gentlemen, because I think it's almost impossible for the modern reader to think of Wilde without seeing him through his disasters—as if there was something wrong with his wit because there was a tragic end to his life. Can we take it for the perfection that it was without thinking about Wilde at all?

*Brown*: Oh, I would certainly think that you have to disassociate it instantly from Wilde's life! After all, the people in England who have produced high comedy — people like Congreve or Etherege or Wycherly or Sheridan — never had to have Wilde's tragedy overtake them in order to excel at frivolity. The quality of frivolity here has nothing to do with his tragic fate. Quite aside from his personal life, which I would like to skip in considering the play, Wilde's tragedy was that when he wrote his fairy stories or *Salome* or about esthetics — when he tried to be earnest — he took himself against his type. As almost everyone is tempted to do. It's the comedian who wants to

play Hamlet. He is a supreme comedic genius, living proof . . .

*Dolbier*: . . . of the importance of being trivial.

*Brown*: The importance of being trivial is what it *isn't*.

*Bryson*: We're talking somewhat as novelists do when they tell us that somebody is very witty, very amusing, very charming; they come through with a string of adjectives and nothing of the charm. What did he do that makes this so wonderful? You've seen it, you've read it, you love it; now *why*?

*Brown*: Well, I go back to the difference again between Shaw and Wilde. Shaw's contention was that he dared to state the truth and that people were so unaccustomed to hearing it, so shocked at hearing it, that they had to laugh to cover themselves. Wilde stated brilliant *half-truths* and he did it in terms of paradoxes; that is, he would edge towards sense and then walk directly away from it, making you see at the same time that there was a value, a half value, there that had the tinkle of truth.

*Dolbier*: Leaving the audience in hysterics as he walked away.

*Brown*: It's like a spoonerism, where transposing the letters of two words changes the sense of the whole sentence. He does almost that in terms of wit, as in the famous proposal scene:

*JACK*: *I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.*

*LADY BRACKNELL*: *I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance . . .*

There, you will admit, is a glorious distortion of the expected answer.

*Dolbier*: Could it be said that Wilde plays with words in the way that Shaw plays with ideas? He stands words on their head and plays tricks with them.

*Bryson*: But there *are* ideas behind these little verbal tricks of Wilde's?

*Dolbier*: I don't think if you look very closely . . .

*Bryson*: The ideas are frail, they won't stand up?

*Brown*: I think they are extraordinarily acute observations, with a sneer in them but no conscience. In Shaw, of course, there is passionate caring behind the laughter. And he didn't have only ideas, he had ideas that added up to a cause of reform. In Wilde the whole morality is to leave bad enough alone.

*Dolbier*: In this play Algernon makes an epigram, as someone is doing every four lines, and Jack asks "Is that clever?" Algernon says: "It's perfectly phrased and quite as true as any observation in civilized life should be."

*Bryson*: Note that: *should* be!

*Dolbier*: Mr. Shaw in his later years wrote a play called *Too True to be Good*.

*Brown*: I think one of the interesting things about this play, just considering the dialogue, is that every four lines, as you say, you can find an extraordinary paradox or epigram, call it what you will.

*Dolbier*: And they look so easy to do! But they're terribly difficult.

*Brown*: John Anderson, the late and much lamented drama

critic, once said that a wisecrack is somebody else's epigram. The epigram is the hardest thing in the world to write, and I do think that the pattern of them here becomes monotonous.

*Dolbier*: Like rain on a roof.

*Brown*: I tried to use that image once in print — that it was like rain on a metal roof, that you wished he had worked only an eight-hour day. You get out of breath, not because *he* is effortful but because it's so hard to keep up with him.

*Bryson*: I suspect that this is more true when you read it than when you see it well produced — because, after all, this man was a dramatist and he had the dramatist's instinct for enabling an actor to time things properly. Where you see a superb performance of this, such as the one with Gielgud, the timing was such that I think you always had this pause, this chance to rest. I wonder if you remember that Anatole France once said that every great dramatist, whether serious or not, put several lines of nonsense between every two lines of wisdom or wit — because in those lines of nonsense the audience had a chance to rest and wouldn't miss the wit when it came along. Sometimes Wilde hurries it a little too much, but a good actor can time it.

*Brown*: You're talking about performance?

*Bryson*: That's right.

*Brown*: I do remember the Gielgud production. One of the great things about it was the essential fact that there never was a betrayal on the part of Gielgud or any other actor that he thought he was saying something funny. A convention of undertakers couldn't have been more professionally grave. The temptation of amateurs, when they try to do this play, is to be convulsed by Wilde, to adopt the tone of those story-tellers who say "I will now tell you a funny joke I heard last week." What's needed is serious gravity, pavane-like gestures, stateliness.

*Dolbier*: Isn't it odd that this is one of the plays that are most often performed by amateur groups and school groups? The fact that it's out of the copyright zone has something to do with it, but another thing, I think, is that it *looks* so easy to play. They find out later that it isn't.

*Bryson*: Mr. Brown knows more about the theatre than I do, but I know more about school children. Every young person wants to be sophisticated and civilized more than anything else. *Every* young girl who thinks she's an actress thinks she's born to play comedy. I have seen one Lady Macbeth played by a girl of thirteen which fairly made my hair curl. It was absolutely magnificent. But I have never seen anybody under the age of the eighty-nine who could play high comedy well.

*Brown*: Well, it takes the full maturing of the talent to master the special style of high comedy. If anyone can ever hear that fine recording made by Edith Evans, one of the great actresses of the world, and John Gielgud, one of the great actors, of the proposal scene in this play, it seems to me that there you have the final model for high comedy.

*Bryson*: Why did this succeed especially well in 1895, Mr.

Brown? You said that one could almost write a social history of England out of Coward, Maugham, and Wilde, if one wanted to. It would be a pleasant way to write a social history.

*Brown:* I think, of course, that it had surprise value — which it no longer has — and furthermore that it had identification. The audience didn't take it merely as a curiosity, it took it as a parody of a living truth.

*Bryson:* That meant, of course, an audience which was only a very small segment of British society.

*Brown:* High comedy throughout the history of the theatre has always had a small audience that was trained to the assumptions of the characters on the stage. That is true. It was first a court audience. One of the problems of high comedy is to survive in a democracy. In democratic countries farce and low comedy — admirable expressions that they are — succeed, but high comedy, where equals speak to equals on a superior and snobbish basis, demands a more limited audience.

*Dolbier:* Who speak with one voice, the voice of a very clever playwright. Have we had any playwrights of that nature in a democratic theatre?

*Bryson:* Could you have?

*Brown:* By all odds, I would say, the American dramatist who has come closest to mastering high comedy is S. N. Behrman. Mr. Behrman's only misfortune is to have been born a man of conscience in a troubled world; he suddenly intrudes upon high comedy with serious situations, which are contrary to his superlative gift for phrasing and witty expressions.

*Dolbier:* While Wilde was a man of free conscience in a very comfortable world.

*Brown:* Who shook his conscience to write his best play.

*Bryson:* That leaves only Shaw as the man who could write comedy and still have a conscience.

*Brown:* Yet they are two different kinds of comedy.

*Bryson:* And Shaw still strikes us as funny. But my memory is that, played with the proper accent, the proper confidence, even *this* strikes us as funny — but not as funny and not as native to us, not as natural, as other things. Well, perhaps high comedy is one of the things that we have to give up in order to have a democracy. But if we can have such great examples as this and still enjoy them, perhaps we don't have to have any new ones.



# GEORGE ELIOT

## *Adam Bede*

(As broadcast March 18, 1956)

QUENTIN ANDERSON • GORDON S. HAIGHT • ALFRED KAZIN

*Kazin:* In the last few years we've all become conscious, I think of a revival of interest in George Eliot. There was a time when Eliot seemed to be just another figure on the schoolroom wall. She was disliked because of her Victorianism, her moralism, her intense respectability. I can remember that when we had to read *Silas Marner* in school, there was attached to her a certain official approval which made for our private disapproval. But now, of course, in the last few years we've seen this wonderful and rousing revival of interest in her work. Her *Middlemarch* is acclaimed as one of the very great novels of the English language; and *Adam Bede*, which we are talking about today, has been generally admired in a way that it never was, perhaps, before her death. Now, how can we explain this amazing revival of a writer who in her own time was considered a Victorian moralist, a bluestocking, a dreadfully stern figure?

*Haight:* I don't think it's altogether a "revival" because *Adam Bede* has been selling very steadily since it came out.

*Kazin:* When was that?

*Haight:* In 1859. It sold eight editions in the first ten months, and it's been a steady seller ever since.

*Kazin:* But it was not the very first novel she'd written.

*Haight:* No, she'd written some short stories that were collected as *Scenes of Clerical Life* three years earlier, but this was her first real novel, a three-volume novel. I suppose the reason for its popularity must be the romantic story, the melodrama of it.

*Kazin:* You mean of its immediate popularity at the time it was printed?

*Haight:* Well, I think that must explain its continued popularity, too. It's always narrative interest that keeps these things alive.

*Kazin:* In this case the melodrama is almost a classic one. A poor young farmer's lass, Hetty Sorrel, living in the Midlands, is seduced by the squire's grandson who is handsome and heedless; she becomes pregnant, she kills the child, and she is sentenced to death. At the very end the squire's grandson saves her, and she is transported. Along the way we meet people like Dinah Morris, a young Methodist preacher, and of course we meet the Bede family. We meet Adam Bede, the handsome Saxon type, a young carpenter, who's all hero — there's nothing weak or soft about Adam. We meet his brother Seth, we meet his mother. And the very fact that Adam is a strong man who loves Hetty but is not loved by her is part of the melodrama again. But, surely, the melodrama itself does not explain all the popularity of this book?

*Haight*: Well, it must have a great deal more than that. It has a background of the country life of the Midlands about the year 1800; the characters grow right out of the life of the community. It's an amazing picture of the parish life of the time, with the squire at the center of it, owning all the land, renting the farms out to the various tenants. And then there's the chief tenant, Mr. Poyser and his family, who've lived on the same farm for a great many generations. Hetty Sorrel is Mr. Poyser's niece, an orphan, who's been brought up by them. She's an outsider, she doesn't really belong to the community, but the picture of the rest of the group is very strongly given.

*Anderson*: One of the things that's especially striking is George Eliot's sense of the colors, the shapes, the forms of life in that community. I have a passage before me, a description of the dairy at the Poyser's farm, which I think is worth reading:

*The dairy was certainly worth looking at: it was a scene to sicken for with a sort of calenture in hot and dusty streets — such coolness, such purity, such fresh fragrance of new-pressed cheeses, of firm butter, of wooden vessels perpetually bathed in pure water; such soft colouring of red earthenware and creamy surfaces, brown wood and polished tin, grey limestone and rich orange-red rust on the iron weights and hooks and hinges. But one gets only a confused notion of these details when they surround a distractingly pretty girl of seventeen, standing on little pattens and rounding her dimpled arm to lift a pound of butter out of the scale.*

That's Hetty Sorrell!

*Kazin*: I see there the kind of thing which makes any writer's background valuable to him, without which nothing happens in a work of literature — that is, a strong, instinctive, and conscious saturation in a certain place. Now Hayslope, the little parish where all this takes place, is this not very near the place where George Eliot was born, in the Midlands?

*Haight*: Yes, I suppose Hayslope grows out of her life near Coventry in Warwickshire.

*Anderson*: Where is this in England?

*Haight*: Well, it's in the Midlands. I suppose she's trying to represent Staffordshire, actually, in this novel, but the scenery and the farm-life are all that of Warwickshire and the Midlands.

*Kazin*: It's been said, hasn't it, that Adam Bede, the hero, the stalwart carpenter, is in some way modeled on George Eliot's own father?

*Haight*: I'm afraid that's why he is, in a sense, a bit idealized as a character. Leslie Stephen says George Eliot could never think of Adam except as a loving daughter would think of her father; she has too respectable a view of him to make him a real carpenter.

*Anderson*: But he is a very splendid source of life as she represents him. True, he's idealized; there are no imperfections. But one gets a sense that this man has command of the things he does, the people he knows — that he has a kind of power which is his own and not like that of the squire or the parson.

*Haight*: I wouldn't agree with you that he's without faults. He has a hot temper, for example. He's very unkind to his mother, who is always whimpering around him; he's very harsh in judging his father, who's taken to the bottle; and he is, of course, equally harsh with Hetty. When her failure to live up to his ideal is revealed to him, he has a hard time reconciling himself to attending the trial or helping her.

*Anderson*: Do you find any significance in the fact that the hero is called *Adam Bede*? You have quoted Leslie Stephen's faintly mocking remark that George Eliot obviously felt all the proper or improper emotions that a daughter may feel in such a case. But, surely, he is more than a father to her. Is he not, shall we say, a symbolic father to a great part of the English nation?

*Haight*: Well, I suppose *Bede* is a good old Saxon name, and Adam is the father of us all. Probably she had something like that in mind in drawing him; he's a kind of archetype.

*Kazin*: Exactly. It seems to me that in drawing Adam Bede, George Eliot was following the tradition of parading a hero on strong racial and national lines. There's a lovely scene very early in the book when the young Methodist girl, Dinah Morris — who, of course, eventually marries our hero, Adam Bede — is shown preaching. Suddenly, Adam appears — walking across the fields. A stranger, who is used technically as a kind of traveling eye for gathering together many parts of the story, notices Adam and comments admiringly on his stalwart look, on the fact that he can carry enormous weight, on the fact that he can walk so many miles a day. Again and again it's made clear that Adam is not only, perhaps, George Eliot's father, but the very stone and sign and pillar of English life. I rather like that part of the book. Although it may be faintly synthetic, not in effect but in intention, nevertheless Adam Bede is really a hero.

*Anderson*: It seems to me that Adam, the first Adam, might have been impatient with a sickly mother; and this Adam — given, as he is, all the attributes of life, unqualified — is sometimes a little impatient of imperfection around him. This is before the Fall, so to speak.

*Kazin*: In drawing someone like Adam Bede, I think that George Eliot was trying to re-create for her period what we think of now as the English hero. And I think that the other characters fall into line. What about someone like Hetty Sorrel? Hetty Sorrel is seventeen years old; we see her in all her young and rather exotic beauty, working in the dairy of her aunt, Mrs. Poyser.

*Haight*: Enjoying the work of making butter — and George Eliot tries to show that the reason she enjoys making butter, especially when the young squire, Arthur Donnithorne, is looking on, is because it sets off her plump arms to such advantage. She's always conscious of the admiring eye on her. All through the book you find these domestic images of farm life — the crops, the hay, the fear that when it rains the hay will be ruined in the meadow, or that if the wind comes up it'll scatter the ripe grain before they can reap it. But Hetty Sorrel doesn't fit into this agricultural picture. Her very name is a weed: sorrel.

*Kazin*: Which means?

*Haight*: Well, it's a kind of sour grass, it's a weed that ruins even our lawns in Connecticut. Hetty Sorrel hates anything hatching, George Eliot says; she doesn't like chicks or lambs or any kind of agricultural life. And you see her vanity not only in this scene in the dairy, but when she's polishing the table. She likes to polish Mrs. Poyser's dinner table because she can see her face reflected in it.

*Anderson*: Isn't that the way that George Eliot institutes what is to be the conflict and division within the book? Adam is completely absorbed in his powers; his capacity to handle his tools is really almost heroic. He makes wonderful windows, and so on, whereas Hetty has lost sight of her function in the world, of what a girl might do and become if she stayed within her own scene.

*Kazin*: In addition to drawing someone as charming and exotic as Hetty or someone as pure as Dinah Morris, George Eliot also had the extraordinary ability to portray a whole society from top to bottom, from the squire down to the innkeeper, to show each in his own place, yet all connected somehow by the special bonds between them. Isn't there, in your mind, a particular quality of relation between the classes here?

*Haight*: Yes, and we might try to describe it by negatives. Think of Fielding, for example, where innkeepers and servants are distinct types, each speaking with its own voice and out of its own history. Well, George Eliot has somehow subdued all these to the color of her own sense of the countryside of her girlhood, so that they don't stand out as types; they are persons completely caught up in a scene. It's a magic that I don't know how to analyze.

*Anderson*: Which classes do they represent?

*Haight*: The Poyser, I suppose, are tenant class. They are the people most respected in the parish, they're the largest tenants, they have the largest farm. Adam Bede is an artisan. He would be just a shade below them. At the party for Arthur's twenty-first birthday, you notice that there's a great problem as to where Adam shall sit — whether he shall sit with the artisan class, with his own family, or whether he shall be moved up with the tenants, who actually hold farms and who look askance at him when he's directed to sit there.

*Kazin*: But in that marvelous scene we see the very special affection that George Eliot had for her native countryside, a sense that all these people are bound together because they live in the same place. There is a feeling of a common loyalty, a common rhythm of life, which somehow is stronger than the small — well, not small but certainly sharp — divisions between them classwise.

*Haight*: I think the reason George Eliot described it with such sympathy is that she herself was a country girl. She was born and brought up in that community, and until she was fifteen years old she spoke the language of Mrs. Poyser. She didn't really learn what we'd call standard English until a good deal later on, and so she naturally had a certain sympathy for it that no one could duplicate who was just studying it as local color.

*Anderson*: Yet she'd been a bluestocking. She had been an editor, had she not, of the *Westminster Review* and she'd been abreast of all

the contemporary intellectual currents. Part of the wonder of the book is that she was able to return with such directness to the rural scene and to see it in its wholeness because she had already been caught up in the larger scene of Europe and London.

*Haight*: She was thirty-eight or thirty-nine when this novel was written, which is a relatively advanced age for a novelist to begin. During the preceding years she had had this intellectual experience of editing a magazine and of meeting people, philosophers and scientists. It had become an overlay on her early emotional experience, so that the two are combined in her.

*Kazin*: We have a woman who comes out of a very strongly felt regional life; we have a woman who's intellectual; we have a woman who in a sense has broken away from an orthodox religious tradition but is herself notoriously, famously full of religious feeling; we have a woman who emerges, comparatively late in life, as a mature novelist. Can you think of anyone else in the same period who had any of these qualities? It seems to me that Dickens, for example, is very much of a city writer; that Dickens, though he had a bizarre mind and a very great mind, is not an intellectual in the same sense that George Eliot is. You can't imagine Dickens translating Feuerbach and Strauss, writing on the newest problems of German liberal theology, and all the rest of it. When I think of the woman as a novelist, I think of so many in our own generation who are also intellectuals.

*Anderson*: But isn't this a modern development? George Eliot took a male pseudonym so that her novels wouldn't be judged as "female" writing. It's curious that you mention Dickens: he's almost the only person who recognized this as a woman's work.

*Kazin*: For me, she has a quality — I don't know if it's a specifically female quality — that I think is remarkable, and I would call it the power of feeling. There are certain writers whose passions burst right from the page. I think she's one of them. When you read her you feel a certain plangent cry of human entreaty as it were, which bursts through the formal character. In fact, if anything is female about her work — and I don't mean this in any invidious sense at all — I think it's the quality of lingering emotionally around the situation, of not letting the story have its remorseless way with itself.

*Haight*: I wonder if a part of that isn't because she was nostalgic for a world she had been more or less banished from, living as she was with a man she wasn't married to. She was isolated from her society; when she wrote to her brother and told him she had not been married, he refused to answer her letter. His lawyer answered it instead. When she wrote this novel she seemed to be very much shut off from this community she loves so deeply.

*Anderson*: Although this may be the *product* of nostalgia, wouldn't you say that the consequence is something over which she has a splendid command? "Plangent cry," the phrase Mr. Kazin used, does have an application, but I have a more humdrum phrase which strikes me as important too. That is her sense of the necessity of connecting her feelings about the past with her knowledge of the world, her sense of the need of making generalities come alive in

connection with the movements of people's souls. This is the thing that leads me to call her a wise woman, a woman who knew that any generality which didn't have its roots in life could not subsist on the novelist's page and lead to anything that really had substance.

*Kazin*: Wouldn't you say, Mr. Anderson — as someone who I know has been thinking about this relation for Henry James — that this bears out the thesis of Mr. Leavis's well-known book, *The Great Tradition*? The thesis was, as you know, that there is a tradition in the English novel which excludes writers, let us say, like Fielding or Dickens, but which includes Jane Austen, George Eliot, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, and D. H. Lawrence. Leavis saw a very specific connection between all these: the strong moral sense, the lack of flamboyance for its own sake.

*Anderson*: Yes, the tradition to which you refer is something that we see embodied in all these novelists. It is a sense of connection with the roots of English life, a connection with enduring values. It is exhibited at least in the early Henry James; he feels obligated to make that kind of connection between Americans and their roots.

*Kazin*: This power of caring, this strong feeling of English countryside, this strong sense of the regional beauty of the world — don't all these combine to make a writer who has a deeper ring to her than most novelists do? It seems to me that for a very long time the novel has been accused of artificiality, of moral shallowness, because it's forgotten exactly what George Eliot represents here in so many ways. Which of her other novels bears this out as well as *Adam Bede*?

*Haight*: Well, perhaps *Middlemarch*, her greatest novel, would be the next one, but they all have it; this philosophy underlies every word she ever wrote. There's a strong moral sense in it, the idea of a justice in the scheme of things, that a wrong that's done will somehow have its influence on everybody — a kind of existentialism, I suppose, a feeling that we're all related, that if you do something wrong other people are going to suffer from it.

*Anderson*: Let not existentialism interrupt our sense of the continuity she celebrates.

*Kazin*: Continuity with the past, perhaps?

*Anderson*: Continuity with the past, the sense that you must connect what you plan to do as a craftsman with its origins in the past.

*Kazin*: Well, may we not say in conclusion that the power of caring, of caring terribly, as Henry James would have put it — because I'm sure Henry James *did* put it somewhere — is exactly what we find in George Eliot. She cares terribly about the significance of what her characters do, she cares terribly about their place in the world, she cares terribly about human actions. In fact, perhaps one can even say at the end that she's one of those writers who, in the best sense of the word, don't surprise us, don't throw us off our path in the world, but who bring us back not to a safe tradition but perhaps to what they think of as the *only* tradition.

# GEORGE SAINTSBURY

## Nineteenth-Century Literature

(As broadcast March 25, 1956)

JEROME H. BUCKLEY • GOUVERNEUR PAULDING • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Saintsbury is one of my favorite bedside books. I think he's the person I'm most likely to turn to if I want to revive in myself an opinion — not that I always agree with what he says, but he always seems to jolt me either into agreement or disagreement. He seems somehow or other to bring the Victorian age back to us with more liveliness and more relevance to our own time than most people.

*Paulding:* Not only does he bring it back to us — he shows the ordinary cultivated man of our time the most absolutely fantastic gaps in his knowledge of the Victorian era.

*Bryson:* You mean gaps in the reader's knowledge, not in Saintsbury's.

*Paulding:* Heavens, no — not in Saintsbury's! There are no gaps there. He covers absolutely everything. But in the reader's knowledge there are great gaps. It isn't a question of whether you like the Victorian era or not; the fact is that all Americans, all people of our time, spring directly from it. It prepared us. Our greatest models, the greatest novelists, wrote in that period; the greatest poets wrote in that period; we were brought up on that period. And yet when you get around to reading Mr. Saintsbury on the period, it's as if you were wandering into an obscure forest; it's filled with names that many of us have forgotten, if we ever read them at all.

*Bryson:* Perhaps we've forgotten all those that haven't been made into movies.

*Buckley:* I suppose you'd say he's a typical Victorian insofar as he has an enormous range, a prodigious breadth of interest; and yet he seems to belong to the later part of the period rather than to the great era of Ruskin, shall we say. I know that Mr. Bryson doesn't agree with me about Ruskin, but . . .

*Bryson:* You couldn't start a conversation about Saintsbury without starting an argument at the same time. He's the kind of critic that always forces you immediately to make up your mind, isn't he?

*Buckley:* Yes; he is provocative, he has gusto, he has common sense, he has enormous catholicity, and yet he spreads himself rather thin. He edges away from subject matter, he always veers towards a kind of art-for-art's-sake judgment, I think.

*Bryson:* Is that typically Victorian — art-for-art's-sake?

*Buckley:* It's typical of the very late part of the period, of the eighties and nineties; although he's not sympathetic with the esthetic movement, he is certainly rather close to Pater, strange as it may seem, in the way he measures a book. A book is a good book if it's a well-written book. It's a bad book if he doesn't like the style. He's interested in style above everything else, I should say.

*Paulding*: You say he's provocative. That's quite true: he's provocative because he seems to me intensely personal about everybody he discusses. And he's personal in a way that is amazing to us now. He puts terrific emphasis on class, on education, on the quality of the gentleman, on having gone to a good school and on wearing the right clothes.

*Bryson*: But they are literary qualities with him, rather than social, aren't they?

*Paulding*: I think they're very much mixed; they're inextricable in his mind. Now we must always admit that genius can come out of any social origin. It's too silly to have to say it. Saintsbury, of course, *has* said it. But for anything just beneath genius, he insists on the classical education which is bound into the social structure of the England of his time. And you find him saying again and again how wonderful it was that Dickens's genius could overcome the appalling handicaps of his birth, and then turning with an immense sigh of relief to Thackeray, whose family was good and who had been connected with the better public schools.

*Buckley*: That would bring up some of his prejudices, of course. He's very reactionary in political and social terms. You would agree, wouldn't you?

*Paulding*: I certainly would. He is reactionary, but I don't think that is what bothers us.

*Bryson*: It doesn't bother me, although I hope I'm not reactionary. I think I would find every one of Saintsbury's political and social opinions not only distasteful but appalling. In fact, I know that I would. I've read enough of him to know that. And yet his opinion about a book just as a work of art is always exciting.

*Buckley*: I think he's a Victorian in this respect, too: he can admire a man with whom he heartily disagrees.

*Bryson*: That's being British as well as Victorian.

*Buckley*: Yes, of course.

*Paulding*: May I disagree with both of you? I don't think that is characteristic of Victorians. I think they had terrific prejudices that show up in their internecine warfare with each other. You can't tell me that Carlyle felt any tolerance whatever toward Ruskin or Morris or any of those others.

*Bryson*: Of course Carlyle was a Scot, Mr. Paulding.

*Paulding*: The one thing Saintsbury is looking for, the one virtue above all — the thing that makes him a very great critic — is that he is constantly on the alert for the one ineffable flash of poetic fire, the perfect phrase, the perfect word, the lovely cadence. When he comes to Coleridge, what does he really say about him? It is that he invented new meters, he gave a new freedom to English poetry — and it's that all the time; he concentrated on loveliness of sound and keenness of image.

*Buckley*: And he admires Shelley above all, because Shelley gives him a poetic intoxication. Now I don't think he's really concerned with form, he's concerned with style.

*Bryson*: You mean form in the sense of structure?

*Buckley*: Yes, structure. He's not interested in it. Look at how



he brushes it off when he comments on *Middlemarch*, which is a very solid novel as far as architectonics are concerned. In the Romantic period, for instance, he says nothing at all about the two long poems of any importance. He tends to dismiss them, both Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and Byron's *Don Juan*. To us they are the great poems of the period; and it's curious that despite his range of judgments, his wide sympathies, he tends on occasion to slight some of the things we have come particularly to admire.

*Paulding*: I myself deplore infinite and tedious concern with the structural in works of art. But you're right, because Saintsbury in talking of Browning, for instance, picked out only the lyrics. It's almost as if he couldn't stand great length in anything except in narrative prose, where it has its reason. He knows that the essence of the poetic thing that he wants can never be sustained, even by the greatest poets. Even in Shakespeare it isn't sustained; it's broken.

*Bryson*: It's a flash.

*Paulding*: It's a flash — and that's what he's interested in.

*Buckley*: Well, what would the flash reveal? Do you believe that he can understand great depth? Does he like depth or does he fear it, does he shy away from anything with a metaphysical implication or overtone?

*Paulding*: Mr. Buckley, there's no definition of the poetic flash. I don't know whether it's a flash in depth or a flash in atomic energy or what it is. It is simply something that nobody has ever said before so beautifully.

*Bryson*: Certainly his treatment of John Donne, Blake, and people of that sort would indicate that he's not insensible to philosophic poetry.

*Buckley*: He's not impervious to it, but he veers away from ideas. His comment on Thomas Henry Huxley, for instance, seems to me interesting. He says of Huxley: "It has been said that a literary critic of the very first class was lost in him at the salvage only of some scientific monographs which, like all their kind, will be antiquated some day, and of some polemics which must equally suffer from the touch of time." In other words, he believes that the critic, like the artist, somehow deals in the permanent realities which will never be quite superseded; whereas the scientist and the polemicist are dealing with topical issues which must necessarily perish. And he's not really desperately concerned with those issues.

*Bryson*: This is what makes Saintsbury so typically Victorian. It's what drops almost a curtain between him and us. It's what puts you and me in a class of antiquarians or antiquities, Mr. Paulding: we still want to look at books in this way, sometimes.

*Paulding*: Mr. Bryson, we have truth on our side.

*Buckley*: It seems to me that Saintsbury's criticism veers away from the psychological, too. Perhaps that's all well and good; we've had such an enormous accent on the psychological in literature since his time. I do like his definition of psychoanalysis, for instance. He says it's "a term used by persons who do not know Greek for processes always questionable and generally mischievous."

*Bryson*: These little sandburs that he puts under people's saddles

as they ride by seem to me to be part of his charm, and don't make much difference in his judgments. What I'd like to know, Mr. Buckley, is whether you agree with some of his judgments about the actual great figures? You said something about Ruskin, and you sort of indicated that I don't admire Ruskin as much as you do, which is probably right. I don't admire him too much. But do you think his judgment of Ruskin was anywhere near the truth?

*Buckley:* I think it's very sound as far as the texture of Ruskin is concerned.

*Bryson:* That's what he was interested in.

*Buckley:* Yes, and he dismisses the ideas altogether. Ruskin was a very profound esthetician. I think that is where Saintsbury, who is a superb analyst of style, falls short. I think that Saintsbury himself is a bit trivial, philosophically speaking, as compared with major philosophic critics like Ruskin or Coleridge or Arnold, for instance, who belonged to an earlier phase of the Victorian era.

*Paulding:* Yes, but I don't think that he is at all right in his judgment of other purely literary people.

*Bryson:* Do you mean that even by his own standards he sometimes goes wrong?

*Paulding:* Even by his own standards. He hardly mentions Trollope at all. He completely fails to give Trollope credit for the intense psychological interest of his characters, which we're rediscovering now. As for Dickens, he admits his immense power for creating character — and there again, I think we differ with him. For our times I think Dickens is almost like Hogarth or the American painter Whistler. What Dickens seems to have created for eternity is a picture of misery and fog in London, the visual things. His characters now simply cannot persuade us at all.

*Buckley:* He admires least in Dickens what we admire most; he says nothing at all about the symbolism, for instance, of Dickens. Perhaps we've over-exaggerated it. But it appears in the late novels, which he thinks mark Dicken's decline. On the other hand, he was perceptive about someone who was not really "discovered" until twenty-five years after this book appeared. He talks of the remarkable talents of Gerard Manley Hopkins — and that, I think, is revealing.

*Bryson:* Yes; I think most people of his time didn't have the slightest idea who Gerard Manley Hopkins was.

*Paulding:* May I make one exception to a comment that I otherwise agree with — that he's not much interested in content. There's one very curious little passage in this book, in which he picks up three Anglican theologians, John Henry Newman (who later became Cardinal Newman), Edward Pusey, and John Keble. Now there he seems to pierce through to the real content of those people. He doesn't talk about their form at all, he talks about their holiness — that's a very strange thing to do in a book of indirect criticism, and I think it's the one thing that seems to have moved Saintsbury profoundly. There's only a page and a half on all three, on that final flare-up in the Church of England — the last real theology developed by anybody in the English-speaking language (except in the Catholic tradition, of course; that goes on). But the last, almost frenzied effort of

those very saintly and extraordinarily wonderful men, who were worried about a category of things, a category of metaphysical speculation and theological speculation — all that has disappeared from the face of the earth, and Saintsbury put his finger on it.

*Bryson*: Also, I think he had a certain pioneer, almost prophetic, streak in him. His concern with the scrutinizing of text, particularly as you see it in his book on prose rhythms, seems to me to be a prophecy of the kind of criticism we have now.

*Buckley*: And unlike so many later critics he really loves literature as such.

*Bryson*: Oh, he loves it!

*Buckley*: And yet he isn't a pedant. Out of him new books are born. He brings a living personality to his criticism of other books. Once he said, "To me, reading is like mental breathing." And it's the mental breathing, I think, that we get throughout this book — and perhaps even more so in his *History of English Prosody*.

*Bryson*: Do we happen to have lost the gusto that he had? Is there something in our times that has made us so sort of lackadaisical about literature? Here is this old giant, who read everything in many languages and loved everything that had anything in it worth loving. Is there something about our times that's made us give up that kind of inclusiveness?

*Paulding*: I don't know what it is, but there's this appalling gap. You can say it's the gap between the Victorian age and ours. I prefer to say it's the gap between those born before 1914 and those born since. There's a break in our heritage. We ought to enjoy reading Shelley, Keats, Thackeray, Dickens, and all the rest of them, but the people of our times do not read them.

*Buckley*: The tremendously increased specialization that has invaded all forms of life has invaded literature, too, so that the great modern novel becomes a difficult task rather than an entertainment. A modern novelist like Graham Greene specializes to the extent of writing "entertainments" on the one hand and novels on the other — but his novels are hard work, and they're intended to be hard work, they're serious. But nineteenth century serious literature is entertaining at the same time. There's a difference there. There's a difference, too, in the possibilities of synthesis in the Victorian period, where a single critic like Saintsbury could try to tie all things together. A single great writer could still take all knowledge, more or less, as his province. And I think that by the end of this book Saintsbury sees the danger coming, the danger of modern specialization, where the literary critics will divide into very particular categories and the literary amateur will forget all about scholarship.

*Paulding*: You remember what he said about the literary critics even of his time, who were fussing about the details of Charlotte Brontë's early life; he defined that as "the futile and idiotic pursuit of the infinitely little with infinite patience." Many of our critics are doing that kind of thing. They are constantly delving into the totally irrelevant; nobody looks at the work itself.

*Bryson*: Of course, that's one of his rejections, very consciously made. He not only rejects the social and economic influences that

make the content of a writer important, he also rejects the psychological side of it, as I think Mr. Buckley said a while ago. He doesn't care when a person was born or what kind of a life he led or how he died, if he can't see in the actual texture of his work some effect of those things—and he doesn't look too hard to find it.

*Buckley:* One interesting thing to me about the book is that he does see a foreshadowing of this specialization; he sees a general exhaustion by the end of the period.

*Bryson:* We shouldn't forget, after all, that Saintsbury did live until 1933, although he was a very old man when he died. We put him in the Victorian era because that's what he wrote about. But even before this cataclysmic change of the first World War that Mr. Paulding spoke about, do you think his prophetic ability was showing up?

*Buckley:* Oh, I think he sees the age as having passed its peak even in the eighties and nineties. He tells us that the stylists of that period — he'd admired them greatly — have exhausted by lavish expenditure all the gifts of style in their own time. He sees a need for renewal, for new directions in literature. The great stylists have exploited all the old themes and all the old literary forms to the point of exhaustion. In a sense, there's a slight tinge of the decadence that we associate with the nineties hanging over this book, although I could hardly call Saintsbury himself decadent in any sense of the word. He also says it's by no means clear that any fresh set of ideas is ready to take the place of the old ones.

*Paulding:* I'm afraid he may very well have been right. Our periods of exhaustion come quicker; the pulse seems to be getting shorter and shorter. A man writes a good book, then *he's* finished. Nothing's happened since the second World War at all. And even between the two wars — those writers were simply a continuation of what was happening before. But what I wondered about in Saintsbury's evocation of this magnificent century — he calls it the greatest in English literature, and perhaps the greatest in the world's literature — was why he couldn't have brought in the great Russians, the great Frenchmen? Because, after all, the thought that is sickened now in the world is not English or American thought, it's world thought. That is what's weak now.

*Bryson:* I suppose he brought it in only in the sense that his judgments were based on world-wide reading; he had read everything; he's almost as good on French literature as he is on English. But he wasn't comparative in the sense that he tried to find a principle that he made explicit. And I suppose that's one reason why we now read him in bits, waiting for our interests to bring us around to something that he happens to be right about.

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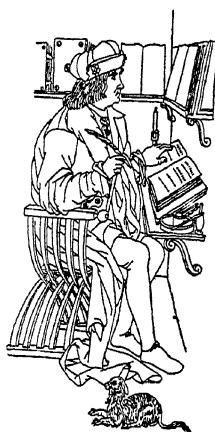
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# THE INVITATION TO LEARNING READER

## *The 'Other' Book & Strange Landscapes*

*Edited By*  
RALPH BACKLUND



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**THE 'OTHER' BOOK**

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# GEORGE SANTAYANA

## Letters

(As broadcast April 1, 1956)

PERRY MILLER

•

LIONEL TRILLING

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* One might say of Santayana that he had two "other" books. Everyone was surprised when a great philosopher wrote a fine novel, *The Last Puritan*, and now we have his *Letters*, which are a kind of running commentary on a long and quite extraordinary life.

*Trilling:* A life that was not in all ways attractive. I say this, even though I think that no book in the last three or four years has excited and pleased me as much as Santayana's *Letters*. But as I began the book, and as I ended it, I had the sense that I didn't really like this man.

*Bryson:* But you don't mind disliking people, do you?

*Trilling:* No, certainly not. I don't dislike disliking Santayana. I enjoyed it and it did me good. But I wonder, Mr. Miller—you knew him in his last days—I wonder what impression you formed of him?

*Miller:* I'm interested in your reaction, Mr. Trilling, because I think it is the kind of impression that Santayana made throughout his long, long life. He's an enigmatic and paradoxical figure, who appears to be preaching a materialism and an atheism which might in ordinary discourse give way to the most licentious hedonism. But, actually, in the midst of this world, he lived a life that would make most Christian ascetics of the Middle Ages seem absolutely dissolute.

*Trilling:* Of course you saw him in his extreme old age, when perhaps asceticism came more easily to him than in his younger days.

*Miller:* No, I think that it was fairly easy for him all along, although he made excursions, as these letters show, into the great world, particularly through friendships such as the one with Lord Russell, the brother of Bertrand Russell.

*Bryson:* About "Bertie" he has some quite sarcastic things to say. He liked the other Russells better.

*Miller:* Oh, he preferred the brother, who was more his idea of a man living completely in the flesh. But the wonderful thing about this withdrawn, ascetic, poetic, dreaming young man, as he was when he was young, was his liking for the healthy life—the life of athletics and the life of society and the life of wit. These things he always prized much more highly than abstract thought. I think that's one reason why conventional philosophers are uncomfortable in the presence of such a spectacle.

*Trilling:* This, of course, is largely the theme of his novel, which I very greatly admire. The asceticism appears in his early old age as a detachment from art. At several points in the *Letters*, you'll remember, he says "We must not be misled by art." I responded to that warmly. His refusal of the modern piety about art moved me very

much. He was interested in truth, he was interested in fact, he was interested in actuality—and art, he said, could even stand in the way of the acquirement of truth.

*Bryson:* Isn't that one reason why you find his austerity almost endearing, Mr. Trilling—that it goes along with this extraordinary rigor and honesty? Asceticism which is merely a means of running away from truth, as well as from life, is not very attractive.

*Trilling:* Yes, but I would not use exactly the word "endearing."

*Bryson:* Well, that's perhaps going too far.

*Trilling:* Though I really wanted to cheer; nothing has given me so much of a sense of what thought is, of what philosophy is, and of what the world is as this book has done. I think part of my pleasure was my sense of never being endeared to this man, of being able to keep my distance from him as he kept his distance from the world.

*Bryson:* But if "endearing" is the wrong word, what's the right word?

*Miller:* I think the right word is his objectivity, which was so relentless that it could include compassion for the human predicament.

*Bryson:* And, that, somehow, gets over to us?

*Miller:* Well, it does to me, although I must confess that I am sympathetic enough with the reactions of normal men. He, you know, has a great phrase, "normal madness." Those of us who are normal are normally mad, whereas he is one who sees behind the facade of normal madness. Men who suffer or live in the plane of normal madness can get awfully exasperated with him. He can seem very much of an esthete and a la-di-da, and very remote from ordinary human suffering and sweating.

*Bryson:* Can you say that he was detached without really being withdrawn? I ask because you have used the words "kindness" and "compassion" (they're not quite the same). He had them both. He's detached but he's not indifferent.

*Miller:* Oh, anything but. His argument—and it's essential to the whole structure of his philosophy—is that a specific organism is involved deeply in its own life; it can only transcend this particular situation in the mind, philosophically, by comprehending it, but it doesn't withdraw from love or passion or earning a living or anything of that sort.

*Trilling:* And yet did you notice throughout the *Letters* that when his compassion goes out—and when it does go out, it is very moving, very touching, very charming, and very precise and delicate—it generally goes out to people who are in some way inferior to him, to old friends who recall themselves after fifty years, to students who have written an essay or a dissertation on him, or to somebody who is in some kind of trouble? Throughout this book there is no reference to any equal; there is nobody whom he saw as his peer.

*Miller:* Yes. The comments that he makes on Bertrand Russell or, say, on Whitehead are really quite insulting.

*Bryson:* But wasn't that perfectly simple and honest? Didn't he think that Whitehead and Russell and Croce and the other men of his own time who might have been considered his peers were really rather fumbling?

*Trilling*: Yes, that is true. But there is no friend to whom he does not condescend, not even his old friend, C. A. Strong.

*Miller*: Well, Strong was a difficult character.

*Trilling*: He was a difficult character. But leaving aside Strong, whose mind was certainly far inferior to Santayana's, he never was able to find one man in all his experience whom he accepted simply as his equal, not necessarily as his intellectual equal but as a spiritual equal. Take a man like Spinoza, who is, I suppose, Santayana's great hero of thought, the man on whom he based his philosophy more than anyone. Spinoza was also a man of great distance, but when Spinoza had a friend that friend was truly his equal.

*Miller*: I should think there are two things to say about that. First of all, Santayana's philosophy—on the surface at any rate—is one which demands for any kind of life, any kind of philosophy, as much right to exist as any other. Therefore, he feels perfectly free to defend his own with a certain ferocity because he isn't trying to subdue and silence others. Secondly, I think these letters show the biographical aspect of this quality. This young man who was thoroughly Spanish, whose first language was Spanish, who was brought to Boston at the age of eight, who had to learn English in the Boston Latin School and go to Harvard as a strange fish and a foreigner, with no social relations, with only a few friends—he had to fight for his life.

*Trilling*: Oh, yes. The fighting I love. This is certainly not what I object to. It's that he cannot possibly see any of his friends except as failures, as "cases"—something of that kind. He himself is humble and modest about his own success in life—I don't mean his fame—but everybody else fails.

*Miller*: Well, really, he was very proud. This was a quality that made life difficult for him when he was in America; and I suspect it finally became so difficult that when at last, in 1912, he had a little income to live on, he wanted to get out of America. There's a story that Bliss Perry tells of talking with William James late one night. James generally made every effort to be kind and protective to Santayana, in order to make sure that nobody would accuse him of attacking Santayana because of their differences in philosophy, but he finally exploded to Bliss Perry and wound up a terrific denunciation of Santayana by calling him an "elegant fish."

*Bryson*: But I want to go back to Mr. Trilling's remarks about the compassionate element in Santayana, which I've had some arguments about.

*Trilling*: Oh, most people would deny it.

*Bryson*: Yes, they say it just doesn't exist—and they include people who admire Santayana very much. You said, Mr. Trilling, that Santayana's compassion was always for an inferior. Aren't there times when somebody who is in just a simple commonplace situation of grief excites his pity? His feeling for that sort of situation is very deep and very real. There's no condescension in his attitude toward human suffering.

*Trilling*: It depends upon the kind of human suffering, I would say.

*Bryson:* I mean the suffering that comes from the accidents of life, such as the letter to the Marchesa Origo when she lost her son.

*Miller:* I think that's a very compassionate and understanding letter. Still, what he really does is to remind her that this is something the human organism can cope with because it is the law of the human organism.

*Bryson:* But it took courage to say that to a woman who had just lost her son. It seems to me that's the deepest kind of compassion.

*Miller:* I quite agree. And I think the whole work of Santayana is a deliberate effort to stand up against modern sentimentality, against what he always calls "moralism"—that is, the kind of people who say the universe has a moral design in which they find surcease and compensation. He would always stand up and say "There is no such thing, let us face it," but not in a purely stoical way. He had an elaborate understanding of the complexity of life to bring to bear on this situation.

*Trilling:* That is indeed true; and his feeling about the nature of the universe, I think, is one of the things that made him so uncomfortable in America, because he could find no American who would agree with him.

*Bryson:* It's very complex, Santayana's attitude toward America. Can you explain it?

*Trilling:* I think that if we're going to talk about the roots of the dislike of Santayana—and this is not one of mine, but . . .

*Bryson:* Our dislike of him?

*Trilling:* Yes, that is what I mean. If we should try to discover why Santayana is disliked, I suppose that the simplest reason would be the things that he says, or is taken to say, about America. Nothing angers an American more than criticism of America, and as for expatriation from America, that is the almost unforgivable sin. There, as you say, his attitude is most complex. But I, being aware of how terribly uncomfortable he was here for many reasons, personal as well as philosophical, feel that he had a very deep affection and admiration for this nation. Don't you feel that, too?

*Miller:* Oh, I think so. I think you have to realize that the cruel things, the satirical things, and the angry things he said about America were all against what he called the "genteel tradition," by which he meant the official culture of America.

*Bryson:* That's right.

*Miller:* Which he thought was hollow and empty and stifling. But the broad expanse of America, the vulgar physical America, he always had an immense admiration for. There's a wonderful passage at the end of the letter to Van Wyck Brooks:

*. . . what Lewis Mumford calls "the pillage of the past" (of which he thinks I am guilty too) is worse than useless. I therefore think that art, etc. has a better soil in the ferocious 100% America than in the Intelligentsia of New York. It is veneer, rouge, estheticism, art museums, new theatres, etc. that make America impotent. The good things are football, kindness, and jazz bands.*

And this is from the great, remote ascetic!

*Trilling*: Yes. There's a cognate passage in one of the letters to Logan Pearsall Smith, who had come to this country for his health. Santayana writes:

*. . . But notice: all learning and all "mind" in America is not of this ineffectual Sophomoric sort. There is your doctor at Baltimore who is a great expert, and really knows how to do things: and you will find that, in the service of material life, all the arts and sciences are prosperous in America. . . .*

From there he goes on to build up a great image of the future America as an entirely different kind of culture:

*Think of that! If material life could be made perfect, as (in a very small way) it was perhaps for a moment among the Greeks, would not that of itself be a most admirable achievement, like the creation of a new and superior mammal, who would instinctively suck only the bottle? . . . And possibly on the basis of that perfected material life, a new art and philosophy would grow unawares, not similar to what we call by those names, but having the same relation to the life beneath which art and philosophy amongst us ought to have had, but never have had actually. You see I am content to let the past bury its dead. It does not seem to me that we can impose on America the task of imitating Europe. . . .*

*Bryson*: He saw the possibility of something new; he might not like it, but he was willing to give it a chance.

*Miller*: At the end of the book there are some letters about the "cold war." Several of his correspondents seem to be trying to get him to commit himself to the American side, but you notice that he will not do it. He says the American system is right for America, but that we must not try to Americanize Europe. He wants Europe to be European.

*Bryson*: He wants Europe to go down in its own ideal, but he recognizes that America may be bringing up a new one.

*Miller*: He doesn't condemn America.

*Bryson*: On the contrary!

*Trilling*: It's a little difficult to pin him down on this thing. His mind is moving over the whole great spectacle and we see him in this book at many points in his career. I was terribly moved by his responsiveness to all literature in his late days, but especially to American literature.

*Miller*: Well, he kept reading everything.

*Trilling*: There are things about Faulkner and Edna St. Vincent Millay and Robert Lowell. I think he really writes the definitive critique of Edna St. Vincent Millay. It's absolutely perfect.

*Miller*: I know that when I saw him he had been reading Robert Lowell. You wouldn't think that a man immured as he was in Rome would be aware of Robert Lowell; Lowell was on the way to see him when I left Santayana and he was very excited about it. He felt this was going to be a great experience.

*Trilling*: His sense of America was certainly large and historical and—in the big sense of the word—cultural, but it also was very personal. He writes at one point of his initial disgust with American tourists when he sees them in Europe, but when he is “obliged to make their acquaintance” he finds himself entirely absorbed by “a sort of contagious kindness and hearty simplicity.” And it never is the American people that he rejects, it’s only American culture.

*Bryson*: And here’s a man who, all through these letters, is trying to explain to sometimes rather stupid misinterpreters what his philosophy really was. When you read these letters, did you feel that you got some hold of Santayana the philosopher as well as the man?

*Trilling*: I, who am a sort of idiot in philosophy, felt that I did.

*Miller*: No false modesty here: we’re talking about Santayana!

*Trilling*: I felt that I got a very immediate communication of the way this man was thinking systematically. Certainly there’s nothing systematic in the book, but I got a sense of what he meant, what his theory of knowledge was, and what relation this had to his theory of morality—which, despite his hatred of moralism, was one of the prime interests of his thought. The book is in that sense an amazing book. It is a *book*, it is not a mere collection of letters; the communication of a whole spirit is remarkably made, don’t you think?

*Bryson*: Yes, do indeed! But do you know after you’ve read this book what is the central position of Santayana?

*Miller*: Oh, I should think not by this book alone. You would have to know what’s back of it.

*Trilling*: Yes, you’d have to have a general sense of it. But isn’t this a kind of distillation?

*Miller*: It is, particularly as so many of these letters are written to people who were bothered and bewildered and puzzled by his tricky metaphysics and who would write him questions. With infinite patience he would expound it and answer them, so that there are many passages here which are—if you are familiar at all with Santayana’s thinking—within a paragraph practically an epitome of his whole complex philosophy. If you comprehend, you don’t need to read the other books except for the pleasure of the style.

*Trilling*: Let me just say parenthetically that only at times does Santayana’s style give me pleasure. I find it rather overwrought and too highly worked. But to go back to his philosophy: I think that almost nowhere in his work can you find as precise a statement of what his materialism is as you can in these letters.

*Miller*: That comes out again and again, especially where he is trying to explain that what he calls “spirit” is not a cause, not an actor in the material world, but is something which arises out of the interplay of atoms in what we call matter; these things—“essences” is his word—are the great systematizations which we call theology and esthetics, and they are the life of spirit. Of course, they are just as important that way as they ever would be in any functional way.

*Trilling*: These “essences”—are they what we would call actualities?

*Miller*: He says they do not exist but they are real, and that is one of his great paradoxes. They do not exist in the same sense in

which we say material substance exists—but then, we don't know that material substance exists; we just say it does.

*Bryson:* But that baffles people who are afraid of this word "materialism." It's a dirty word to them, and they think he means that religion, art, science, and these things which are just symbolic structures are somehow not worth bothering about.

*Miller:* Oh, on the contrary! With him they are the only things worth bothering about. The universe is a symbolic construct for him. And if he is a skeptic, he is one in the very largest sense of the word. His impulse is never to devalue, but always to value highly whatever comes under his purview. All this proves what a fascinating and complex figure he is. I'm sure we haven't even begun to get an outline or impression of him, but it does show that here is one of the great minds of our day. That's all there is to it.

*Bryson:* Well, I don't know that that's *all* there is to it, because he could be talked about endlessly. You could go on and on.

*Miller:* Oh, yes, I meant that!

*Bryson:* That's a perfectly good final judgment: it is one of the great minds of our day, and perhaps his purpleness of prose—which disturbs you sometimes, Mr. Trilling—is just one of those minor faults we have to forgive him for. After all, the man was a great stylist and sometimes he overindulged himself, but these letters nevertheless give us a touch of genuine greatness.

## HEINRICH HEINE

### Travel Sketches (*Reisebilder*)

(*As broadcast April 8, 1956*)

WALTER COHEN

•

VICTOR LANGE

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* It has always seemed to me that Heine, although one of the greatest of the Germans, was not specially *German* as a writer. Perhaps only a person whose German is a bit shaky could say that. Heine is clear, as some Germans are not. (I think you'd agree, Mr. Lange, that some Germans are not?) But Heine seemed to make something more out of the travel sketch than anybody else ever had done. Am I right?

*Lange:* I think you could almost argue that the travel sketch is the most congenial form for a mind so versatile, mobile, roving, almost so uncommitted as Heine's. He had an extraordinary curiosity, an eye, to be sure, senses that perceive, and most of all a curiosity that liked to reflect upon itself.

*Bryson:* It wasn't mere reporting?

*Lange:* No, he was not simply reporting what he found. There

are lots of travel books of the period that provide much better accounts of the world than Heine's.

*Cohen*: No doubt there are people who would say that Heine's personality best shows itself in his lyric poems, in which—in German—he's the unparalleled master. And yet it's certainly true that in the *Travel Sketches*—particularly in the *Harzreise*, the one that first burst upon the world and showed it what a fresh and brilliant personality this was—he showed himself equally a master of prose. The *Harzreise*, the one that I think of most happily and that seems to me to have most of Heine's gift in it, is something in the tradition of Lawrence Sterne—undoubtedly he had been influenced by Sterne—and something in the tradition of Washington Irving. But most of all it's in the tradition of Jack Frost: Heine simply turns himself loose on the scenery, and becomes more important than the scenery itself.

*Lange*: Yes, that's true. But wouldn't you say that the difference between the first of these travel sketches and the subsequent ones is more than just a difference in topic? The first deals, as you remember, with a trip that Heine took, after having been expelled from the University of Göttingen, through the Harz mountains. The subsequent books deals with much larger issues—with Italy, France, England—and are different in manner, in style, perhaps even in the kind of conviction that made him write them. They seem to me much more those of a responsible person. The *Harzreise* is the work of a very gay and, of course, ironic young man who's a little mad at the world, but who has this wonderful gift of turning it upside-down and enjoys it; later, he becomes more serious.

*Bryson*: Underline the "young," Mr. Lange. There is a good deal of straight student spoofing in this book.

*Lange*: Yes, he was twenty-three or twenty-four when he composed these early sketches.

*Cohen*: Undoubtedly it's increasing years that marks the difference between the first part of the *Reisebilder* and some of the later parts. And yet, I don't know that the later parts gain more than they lose. It's true that the later ones—the reports from Italy, the notes on England, and so forth—are marked by more attention to ideas than we find in the *Harzreise*. We would expect that a man growing older, becoming better acquainted with the world of letters and the world at large, would turn his eyes to other things than the mere beauties of nature.

*Bryson*: You're letting him age awfully fast, Mr. Cohen! There are only five or six years here in which he wrote these things. He had a big success with his first, the *Harzreise*, didn't he?

*Cohen*: Yes, the first volume gave him a position.

*Bryson*: He became a literary man very early—and, after all, Heine had very little worldly success during the rest of his life. I wonder whether he became a conscious artist and thought, "Well, now, if people like this, let me put some more freight into this train; let's put in a few ideas; let's get ideological; let's get critical"?

*Lange*: That seems to point toward something that's always worried me, and that is: what was Heine really after? It's true that



the later books are more serious, it's true that they have a greater degree of political maturity; but aren't they, just as the first one, loose in their thinking, really interested only in the fun of writing, in the fun of representing people, however full they may be of a curious kind of vitality? It's crabby sometimes, it's narrow-minded, but it's full of life.

*Cohen*: More—it's mad. It's in places a very insensitive personality; despite all Heine's delicacy and penetration and ability to touch up the darkest and most obscure places with light, he is too obtuse in many ways; he is insensitive to other people's feelings. One of the criticisms of Heine has always been that he lacks charm because he lacked love. Well, he *doesn't* lack the charm, I suppose; that comes from great dexterity and wonderful ability to manage his pen. But he lacks perhaps the deeper charm, again except in that first part of the *Reisebilder*, the *Journey to the Harz*.

*Bryson*: I'm sure, Mr. Cohen, that you don't make remarks like that innocently. You know perfectly well that when you say Heine was insensitive, you're outraging many people who grew up on his lyrics and think that he wrote some of the most beautiful love poems in the world—which he undoubtedly did.

*Cohen*: Heine was marvelously sensitive to his own feelings.

*Bryson*: Yes, his own feelings. But other people's feelings he didn't care so much about?

*Cohen*: Other people's feelings were very largely the material of literature to him.

*Bryson*: Well, I wouldn't want to argue it, but I should think that maybe that makes the great lyric poet.

*Lange*: Isn't it also true that as Heine grew older—and actually he wasn't very old when he died, only fifty-eight—you begin to find in his writings a sense of great loneliness, a groping for human contact? He seems to me to take back a great deal of that nastiness he spread in his earlier works. He said, I remember, a few years before his death: "If there was any poison in me, it was only anti-poison; it was a kind of anti-toxin for those snakes that lie in wait so menacingly in the rubble of the old cathedrals and the castles."

*Cohen*: Exactly. It's a concern, perhaps, to rehabilitate himself with a large part of the public whom he had alienated through his writings or whose sensibilities he had offended with his indelicacy.

*Bryson*: But he didn't start by offending the public. And the background was rather unpleasant, anyhow: he wrote the *Harzreise* just after he'd been thrown out of Göttingen University.

*Cohen*: I'm glad you come back to the *Harzreise*, Mr. Bryson, to that first utterly winning and charming book. It seems to me the most important part of the *Reisebilder*, because it is the one in which his naturalness and peculiarly delicate wit and charm come through most easily and freely.

*Lange*: Isn't there a lot of perversity, though, in that book? I mean in the artistic sense.

*Bryson*: There's certainly impudence!

*Lange*: Impudence. But he talks lovingly of the Middle Ages,

of the myths, of the fairy tales; he puts in these little girls, these sentimental images, which he knew the bourgeoisie loved to hear him talk about—and he believed it.

*Cohen:* I believe so. I really do believe so, Mr. Lange; I think the material that Heine employs in the *Harzreise* is drawn from whatever heart he had. And one of the reasons why this has remained the most memorable part of the entire *Reisebilder*, or *Travel Sketches*, is that sincerity is most present in it.

*Bryson:* But you say "whatever heart he had," remembering again all the lyrics that we ordinarily think of as representative of Heine. Isn't there already in Heine's life at this time a resentment against the bourgeoisie, the stuffy middle class of Germany, which he felt had discarded him on three counts: because he was Jewish, because he was a poet, and because his uncle didn't happen to like him? Isn't there a growing suspicion that he had personal reasons for being a bit nasty, to use Mr. Lange's word? It isn't *just* perversity.

*Cohen:* Of course he had personal reasons. Heine was a man of uncomfortable position. He was uncomfortable in his own background. He was uncertain of himself. Perhaps this is why he seemed uncertain of the public whom he meant to address and why he turned now to this side, now to that. Really, he had no sense of where his own personality lay, or what his own individuality consisted of. And yet, on the whole, I think that if you stress too much the public aspect of Heine's personality and career, you are being too "historical" and are not touching on the thing that makes Heine a radiant and vivid and living figure for us. Because I think he *is* that kind of figure. Matthew Arnold, for instance, in his famous essay on Heine says that he was two things: a fighter for freedom and a great lyric poet. He said that for the nineteenth century, his being a fighter for freedom was more important; for the future, his work was more important.

*Lange:* Of course, this is in part what Heine himself said. You remember the famous quotation about the laurel and the sword—that he would prefer to have a sword placed on his grave, because he thought of himself not as a poet but as a fighter for liberalism and in the cause of emancipation.

*Cohen:* And yet, if we inquire too closely into that part of his character, I think we're bound to have a less exalted opinion of him than we would if we neglected it, because Heine compromised himself continually.

*Lange:* As a *person*. But I think you cannot get at the real substance of Heine if you don't recognize his very genuine and, for the German nineteenth century, quite remarkably articulate concern with the world he lived in. That is, we must recognize him as a cultural critic. I think that Heine can be, perhaps not liked—this is a different matter—but most successfully assessed in the company, say, of Marx and Nietzsche and people like that. He is a fighter against the phony. This is what he dislikes in Christianity. It's stale. This is what he dislikes in the aristocracy. They're phony fellows. There's nothing genuine about them. And, like Nietzsche, he doesn't feel that he is quite ready to say what ought to take their place; he is not sure about

the proletariat, although he knew Marx and for years had close relations with him.

*Cohen*: Yes, he worked with Marx.

*Lange*: But he rather winces at the thought of revolution, you see. He's afraid that revolution will destroy culture, and he sets up what he calls Hellenism—a kind of pagan, secular, materialistic faith; yet he is constantly concerned with the true, the good, and the beautiful.

*Bryson*: He goes back constantly, as both you and Mr. Cohen have said, to the ancient German myths, the ancient German culture, the things that are pre-scientific, pre-rational—not Hellenic at all but *echt Deutsch*. He felt that there was something in the true German soul.

*Lange*: This, of course, is at the bottom of his craving for an image of the heroic, isn't it?

*Bryson*: But he never found it, did he?

*Lange*: Never quite, no.

*Bryson*: Napoleon, he felt, might be it.

*Lange*: Of course, Napoleon remained to him the image of heroism, as against Wellington. Do you remember his wonderful picture of Wellington in England—that shabby fellow, you see, with his little tricks. . .

*Bryson*: All he did was win the Battle of Waterloo.

*Cohen*: Or that splendid comment on Napoleon! Heine said: "How badly all his enemies have ended: Louis XVIII rotting on his throne, Castlereagh cutting his throat, and Professor Somebody still a professor at Göttingen."

*Lange*: Or Scott: do you remember the contempt he has for Scott? He says "The English have merely murdered Napoleon, but Scott has sold him." This is great contempt.

*Bryson*: And yet, wasn't there some uneasiness about that? After all, Napoleon didn't really fulfill this role of hero. In the early phases of the Napoleonic Wars, of course, Napoleon set free some of the small German states, but Heine certainly lived long enough, particularly in Paris, to know that Napoleon was not really what he wanted.

*Cohen*: He knew it very early, Mr. Bryson, and here again I must come back to the *Harzreise*. The passages that he wrote on Napoleon are in the second volume of the *Reisebilder*, although they had originally been intended for the first volume. But Heine, thinking that they spoiled the effect of that first volume, took them out and reserved them for a later part of the publication. There, again, he calculates—as we should expect; an artist's calculation is one of his necessities. Yet I think that if Heine had been simply this public character of whom we are creating a picture, he would not be a man of whom we'd be speaking today. What made Heine's impact on the public was the first book of the *Reisebilder*; after that things were accepted from him, perhaps as departures from himself, perhaps as advances on himself. But, on the whole, they were less important than this *Journey to the Harz* from his early *Reisebilder*.

*Bryson*: Because the fighter for freedom supervened on the poet?

*Lange*: Was Heine really a fighter for freedom?

*Bryson*: Well, *he* thought so.

*Lange*: I think the public was not altogether ready, in a sense, for Heine. I mean that the whole business of freedom in Germany in the nineteenth century was a very curious matter. Heine himself, I think, wasn't quite sure. This whole view of revolution as restoration is a peculiarly German notion.

*Cohen*: Yes. I wonder, though, if it wasn't really a part of Heine's surface rebellion as a young man? As young men, and particularly young poets, grow older and lose their hair, they lose their rebellious qualities. Then, as we approach the end, conformity rules us all. Heine, as if he had a premonition of that, conformed *before* the end of his life. After all, this great fighter for freedom, the man who had fled from Germany for the free air of France, accepted a pension from the French government. There was always some question that perhaps he was performing a service for that pension.

*Lange*: Yes, that's certainly true. I think his whole role in France was a dubious one: remember not only his dislike for the political and social conditions, but also his willingness either to keep quiet or to report acidly on it to the Germans without quite believing in what he said. There is this extraordinary and very disturbing ambiguity.

*Cohen*: But I think it does Heine no service, perhaps does no writer any service, to dwell too much on the material from whence his ideas came.

*Bryson*: Aren't you both making the mystery all the deeper when you suspect his sincerity as a fighter for freedom? You say that his prose is loaded with ideological conflicts that we no longer have any interest in, and yet we read these things—not only the *Harzreise*, but the essays about Italy and the sketches about England; I think we read them now with a great deal of interest.

*Cohen*: We read them not only with great interest, but with great admiration. It's not a unique interest, however, and it's not a unique admiration; I think, as we read them, we must say to ourselves that a dozen other men could have done them. Heine is doing very dexterously what some very clever writer could do today, and the mere fact that we think of Heine in the context of today is implicitly a criticism of him. He is not timeless enough to be thought of apart from time. We say he would fit in today; he'd be perfectly modern. But who would dream of saying that of Goethe, for instance?

*Lange*: Heine would probably be a very welcome contributor to *The New Yorker*.

*Cohen*: Yes, I should think he would—which is perhaps not to say the kindest thing about him.

*Bryson*: Are you trying to place him in his ultimate rank, Mr. Cohen? Of course he doesn't quite come at the top level as Goethe does, but how many Germans do?

*Cohen*: But I don't want us to turn away from the work of Heine which does entitle him to his highest rank . . .

*Lange*: And that, you would say, is his poetry?

*Cohen*: I should say certainly the lyric poems, but also this

utterly new kind of prose, this utterly new method of handling the German language, which Heine introduced in the *Harzreise*.

*Bryson*: I'd like to ask a question here about Heine's history. Perhaps you can answer it, Mr. Lange. How much French did he know when he wrote the *Harzreise*?

*Lange*: Very little at that time.

*Bryson*: Because I've always said, in my reckless layman's way, that one reason why I read Heine with more pleasure than I do most Germans is because he writes like a Frenchman.

*Lange*: Well, he does. There's no doubt about it. And, actually, great German stylists such as Nietzsche and Heinrich Mann, for instance, have always said that this is the kind of German they liked to see.

*Cohen*: You are complimenting him, Mr. Bryson, as though *you* were a Frenchman.

*Bryson*: Well, you don't have to be a Frenchman to know that the French can write prose as few modern nations can. What I mean is that, knowing French better than I do German, I handle Heine's prose better than I do that of some of the others. But still I'm saying something that is real, not just my own preference: there is a clarity, there is a line of logic, and there's something which does not save predication for the end of the sentence.

*Lange*: Heine's great dislike for the curiously German inwardness is perfectly obvious in his prose, his dislike for escaping into misty corners of feeling. He's always precise there. Though he may hurt people, he will never becloud an issue.

*Cohen*: And there's more, too, than a superficially French manner of handling prose. It's certainly his personality that makes for the wonderful airiness, delicacy, and lightness of his prose. After all, it has always seemed to me that every writer from the beginning of time has said only one thing: I am Homer, I am Shakespeare, I am Heine—but how he says it!

*Bryson*: Not just when spoken but when read, Mr. Lange, does it sound different from other German prose? How does Heine sound when you read him?

*Lange*: May I read something?

*Bryson*: Yes, please!

*Lange*: I think it would be very amusing. Perhaps we can have the English later on, but here is a passage from the *Harzreise*, which runs as follows:

*Während ich so in Andacht versunken stehe, höre ich, dass neben mir Jemand ausruft: "Wie ist die Natur doch im Allgemeinen so schön!" Diese Worte kamen aus der gefühlvollen Brust meines Zimmergenossen, des jungen Kaufmanns. Ich gelangte dadurch wieder zu meiner Werkeltagsstimmung, war jetzt im Stande, den Damen über den Sonnenuntergang recht viel Artiges zu sagen, und sie ruhig, als wäre nichts passiert, nach ihrer Zimmer zu führen. Sie erlaubten mir auch, sie noch eine Stunde zu unterhalten. Wie die Erde selbst drehte sich unser Unterhaltung um die Sonne. Die Mutter äusserte: die in Nebel versinkende Sonne*

*habe ausgesehen wie eine rotglühende Rose, die der galante Himmel herab geworfen in den weitausgebreiteten, weissen Brautschleier seiner geliebten Erde. Die Tochter lächelte und meinte der öftere Anblick solcher Naturerscheinungen schwäche ihren Eindruck. Die Mutter berichtigte diese falsche Meinung durch eine Stelle aus Goethe's Reisebriefen, und frug mich, ob ich den Werther gelesen hatte?*

*Cohen:* I wish, though, that you would read it in English, because I have the uncomfortable feeling that Heine in German reads like Heine, but that spoken he *sounds* only like German.

*Bryson:* He never sounds quite as good as he does in German, I'm afraid. Nobody translates him.

*Lange:* No, the translations are all very inadequate. That's something peculiar about the German, isn't it? It can't be translated.

*Cohen:* I think all translations probably have a merit compared with each other, but none in comparison with the original.

*Lange:* That's very true.

*Bryson:* What is that passage in English?

*Lange:* Well, the passage is this: "As I was standing, sunk in devotion, I heard someone calling outside me 'How beautiful is nature in general!' These words came from the emotional breast of my roommate, the young merchant. Through them I returned to my workaday mood now in a position to say many pretty things to the ladies about the sunset and to lead them quietly, as if nothing had happened, back to their room. They permitted me to entertain them for an hour. Like the earth itself, our conversation turned about the sun. A mother declared that the sun, as it sank into the mist, had looked like a red, glowing rose which the gallant heaven had cast down into the outspread white bridal veil of its beloved earth. The daughter smilingly expressed the opinion that the sight of such phenomena of nature, if viewed too often, weakened their impression. The mother corrected this false opinion by quoting a passage from Goethe's *Travel Letters*, and asked me whether I had read that," and so on and so on.

*Cohen:* Wouldn't you agree, Mr. Lange, that some of the nicest points, though, have been omitted in that translation?

*Lange:* Oh, yes!

*Bryson:* The impudence is gone, the little, unexpected, daring turns of phrase that he introduced into German.

*Lange:* Exactly—the light touch. And I think the translations of the lyric poems are even more horrible in English.

*Cohen:* The mention of Goethe's name there reminds us of a most amusing incident. You remember how speechless he was when he finally stood in Goethe's presence. Goethe asked him: "What are you writing now?" Do you remember that? "A *Faust*," Heine answered. Goethe thereupon had nothing else to say.

*Lange:* Wonderful!

*Bryson:* But Heine must have seen the joke of it; he could see jokes on himself. But what does he mean to us today? If the meaning of his polemics has gone out of his writing, if we no longer think his ideology is alive, is there anything left besides his lyrics?

*Cohen*: The meaning goes out of polemics as soon as they are waged, but Heine remains perhaps the supreme German lyric poet, and one of the most charming prose writers in German, the precursor of Schopenhauer, of Nietzsche. I think those are the only two men whose style can be compared with his.

*Lange*: I think that in the passion and intensity of his searching criticism of the nineteenth century, he really ranks in the company of the very great. He may not himself be the greatest—those comparisons are always odious—but I think he's one of the very great. And the Germans, though a little uncomfortable about his nastiness, have always been secretly proud of him.

*Cohen*: Undoubtedly he had a genuine inspiration to seek that high place among the fighters for freedom—and yet I often wonder what would have happened had Heine *not* been turned down by his wealthy uncle's eldest daughter.

*Bryson*: Those speculations are interesting, but you yourself know that if he *had* become a successful merchant he probably would not have become either the writer of great travel books or the writer of still greater lyrics. I wish some great genius of lyric poetry could sometime translate Heine and leave part of his gift intact.

## IVAN TURGENEV

### On the Eve

(As broadcast April 15, 1956)

HARVEY BREIT

• FRANK O'CONNOR

• LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: In some way that I wouldn't undertake to explain, Turgenev seems to have dropped in our estimation from the top rank of Russian authors. I sometimes suspect that it's because we now read Russian authors largely for their political insights, and Turgenev's politics are no longer very contemporary. The Russia that Turgenev writes about with such discernment is a Russia that we can scarcely believe ever existed.

*O'Connor*: I think that's true, and *On the Eve* is a political novel to begin with. Turgenev himself was a democrat and a passionate believer in democracy. There's a wonderful letter of his in which he says, "Man's only true fatherland is democracy—and if the Russians win, that will be the end of democracy." He was a passionate politician.

*Bryson*: A passionate politician who never took much active part in politics. He couldn't, of course, in the middle nineteenth century. What could one do in Russia except write novels about politics?

*Breit*: I wonder about it as a political novel. And one of *your*

remarks, Mr. Bryson, I wondered about too: don't we read Chekhov still? And isn't that also a kind of remote political region for us?

*Bryson*: But when you say "we read Chekhov still," just who are "we"? I think there is a group of people in the English-speaking world who read Chekhov and look at his plays when they get a chance, but I don't think Chekhov is read with anything like the widespread enthusiasm that Dostoevsky and Tolstoy are.

*Breit*: No, I agree.

*Bryson*: He's rather a cult. I don't mean that in the wrong sense, but he's special; he's caviar, to be Russian about it.

*Breit*: What I would like to know more about is the need for action in Russia at the time Turgenev was writing this book, as well as the whole political reality of that day.

*Bryson*: When he called this book *On the Eve* he meant, didn't he, on the eve of the great change? He didn't anticipate the Communist change, but he did anticipate a revolution.

*O'Connor*: Yes. And the whole book, rather like that other book of his, *Fathers and Sons*, is a plea for action. The hero of it is a man called Insarov, who resembles in lots of ways the hero of *Fathers and Sons*, Bazarov. He's a Bulgarian. He's a Bulgarian merely because Turgenev felt that there was no Russian of his time who was strong enough to do what needed to be done.

*Breit*: Was Bazarov also a Bulgarian?

*O'Connor*: No, not intended to be.

*Bryson*: *Fathers and Sons* was written later on; wasn't the political situation a bit different then? I mean that it had taken a sharper shape. I wonder if he had made Insarov, the hero here, a Bulgarian because it was a good deal safer to write about a revolutionary Bulgarian trying to free his country from the Turkish Empire than it would have been to write about a Russian trying to free his country from Czarist domination?

*O'Connor*: A very nice point. Well taken! I think you're probably quite right.

*Breit*: Mightn't it be twofold, though? Turgenev did feel, as many Russians must have felt at the time, that Russia itself had not yet produced a leader, a liberal-minded and strong man of action with a will to conquer.

*Bryson*: Yes, that's right. And this is, obliquely but nevertheless very forcibly, a complaint against the lack of will in the Russian people, isn't it?

*O'Connor*: It is.

*Bryson*: Well, what is there in Turgenev that made him want to do this? I mean, was this just *political conviction*?

*O'Connor*: I think in these two books it's certainly a political conviction, the feeling that the Russian character is weak. Turgenev himself wrote a critical essay called *Hamlet and Quixote* in which he makes the Russians the Hamlet of his day, and says all the real work of the world is done by the Quixotes. Now Insarov in this book is a Quixote; he's a man who goes out and gets things done.

*Bryson*: You've testified on a number of occasions, Mr. O'Connor, that you admire immensely Turgenev's capacity to make his points



with great skill and exquisite taste. What kind of machinery does he use here to show the relation between the man of will and the Russian soul? You have to talk about soul if you're talking about a Russian novel. What's his story?

*O'Connor*: There is very little story in the novel. It is simply the account of a love affair involving a young woman who is longing for a strong character. At last she meets one, this Bulgarian. I think somewhere in the book the line occurs: "He's a man who will do anything." The crisis of the book is probably the point where some drunken German insults the women at a picnic, and Insarov chucks the German into the lake. This is intended to represent the sort of thing that he is willing to do. The other characters are all too weak for direct action.

*Bryson*: It's very convincing. The insolent Prussian goes over with a great splash, and you feel happy about it. But now, something must *happen* in a story; is it possible to write a story where nothing happens, Mr. O'Connor?

*O'Connor*: Turgenev did his very best to remove all the elements of story-telling, to leave what he called the integral truth of the situation. Very little happens in this novel. Elena and Insarov fall in love; she defies her family, defies her friends, and goes off to Bulgaria with him. Apart from that, it's very hard to say that there is any action at all in the book.

*Bryson*: But after all, what is the date of this book? It's nearly a hundred years ago. . . .

*Breit*: The late 1850s.

*Bryson*: That a Russian woman of good family (the good family, of course, is proved by the fact that her father was a scalawag and guilty of the most scandalous behavior) should actually have pursued this man, when she knew he was ill, to his lodgings and taken care of him, defying all convention—now that was *something* a hundred years ago. It wouldn't be much now. But that's plot, isn't it? She was the aggressive one in the love affair. He tried to run away from her.

*O'Connor*: Yes, I think she's a typical Turgenev heroine to that extent. Turgenev's heroines always have a tendency to run after the men, while the men just let themselves be run after. That's about all they do. Now Insarov is a man of great will-power and all the rest of it, but he just doesn't go for this girl.

*Bryson*: He wants to devote himself to Bulgarian freedom.

*Breit*: But he also ran away from love. Quite aside from nationalism and the desire to liberate one's people, I think it is a psychological truth that young men who are dedicated to some literary or political end are always worried that love will distract them. It's part of the idea of will.

*Bryson*: Yes—that he was strong enough to deny himself the love of this beautiful and charming creature in order to devote his energy and time to his country. I don't think he'd have run away from love if he hadn't loved his country more than he did himself.

*Breit*: I think he might have anyway.

*Bryson*: You think that's characteristic of the man of action?

*Breit*: Yes, I do.

*Bryson*: At least that's what Turgenev seems to have thought.

*Breit*: Before you leave that point, I would like to raise this question about the lack of story or the denuding of plot. Isn't there a kind of *blueprint* of action and of plot? Turgenev, I think, we all regard as a great craftsman; is it possible that he evaded a problem by simply blueprinting and refusing to elaborate on a series of events?

*Bryson*: Well now, look at the events, Mr. Breit. I think you have to declare them explicitly before you can settle a point like that. Elena meets the Bulgarian; she falls in love with him; he tries to run away from her; she chases him to his lodgings; he's ill—that's a very important point in the plot; they marry, contrary to all the rules and the wishes of her family; she follows him. . . .

*O'Connor*: They go to Venice, where they hear a performance of *Traviata*.

*Breit*: A beautiful scene.

*Bryson*: Yes; she can see the death on his face as they listen to the dying Violetta. But they're on their way back to Bulgaria to save the country. And when he dies on the way, she puts on perpetual mourning and disappears in the mountains, to become a kind of everlasting nun of love and sacrifice and patriotism. It could be quite a sensational story. It could be made full of rather violent and exciting incidents, couldn't it, on that same framework?

*Breit*: Is that what you mean, Mr. O'Connor, by organic truth? He has the possibilities of a good, rousing story but refuses the gambit?

*O'Connor*: Yes, although I still wonder whether it could be. Even as Mr. Bryson tells it, he makes it sound much more interesting than it really is.

*Bryson*: It's too bad I can't write as well as Turgenev.

*O'Connor*: I think we'd all like to be able to do that. But it's not only that, you see; it's the refusal to tell a story, the refusal to play with the reader—to narrate. All those tricks of the story-teller are abandoned in this just as he abandoned them in his short stories. But there's a big difference between the short story and the novel. I wonder if you can sustain the interest right through a long book if you leave out all these narrative devices?

*Bryson*: You think he did that deliberately? He had a theory of fiction.

*O'Connor*: He had a theory of fiction; he came in the generation after Dickens, Balzac, and Gogol, and though he admired Gogol enormously—in fact, he was exiled to his estate as a result of something he wrote about Gogol—he still objected to those writers as Trollope in England did. Trollope says somewhere that there isn't a single character in Dickens who's alive; Turgenev says, "In all Balzac's works there isn't a single character who's alive, who is real." He was trying to get away from that highly sensational story-telling of the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century.

*Bryson*: And in the short stories and in the sketches it's wonderful.

*O'Connor*: It's superb.

*Bryson*: Well, then, why doesn't it stand up in a novel?

*O'Connor*: I just think that the novel is probably too long a form.

*Breit*: Perhaps Turgenev instinctively was aware of the error in his own relatively valid theory. Instead of using the tricks of other writers, he introduced wonderful oases of landscape description, lovely weather scenes, and paragraphs of that sort—things that he could perfectly well have knocked out, annihilated, if he were going to be very strict in terms of this theory.

*Bryson*: I think that may also explain why Turgenev is not as popular now as the more, shall we say, conventionally dramatic Russian writers. I'll never forget an old uncle of mine, sitting one time in my house reading a magazine, and casting it on the floor and saying, "When I want to read a story I don't want to read a blankety-blank weather report!" It seems to me that the American reader is a little impatient with these "weather reports." Turgenev's exquisite feeling for landscape, even his exquisite feeling for people, sometimes seems a little too much just that.

*Breit*: It's action and drama that a good many of us demand now.

*Bryson*: And which we get, if we want to read a Russian, from Dostoevsky or Tolstoy or some of the others. Is there anything in Turgenev's own personality that explains a man who passionately loves the idea of a man of action, but who can only realize him in fiction—and then in fiction runs away from action? There's a paradox here.

*O'Connor*: The paradox is in the book, as well. I think the thing in Turgenev's life that gave him that passionate desire for action was his terrible childhood; his mother was a brutal, domineering woman who had him and his brother regularly flogged with the male slaves on the estate.

*Bryson*: And that wasn't just to make a man of him?

*O'Connor*: It was not to make a man of him, it was because she hated anything masculine; she tried to crush it out of him. And after that there was always a paralyzed will somewhere in Turgenev. He was aware of it; you get it in this book, you get it in *Fathers and Sons*—just the feeling that this is what he would be if he could. He's all the time identifying himself with Russia. Russia is a paralyzed giant: so is Turgenev.

*Bryson*: Where is the domineering, brutal, cruel mother in the history of Russia? What feminine element in their culture or civilization destroyed their will? Does the parallel run true all the way?

*Breit*: I think the parallel needn't go that far. Mr. O'Connor's point is a biographical one; that is, Turgenev had a cruel mother who tormented him a good deal. Because of that, there was a projection from Turgenev into an identifying but opposite character: the man of strength and will who could not only *act*, but act sternly and throw the German into the lake.

*Bryson*: And, of course, the women are always the aggressive ones. He still admired that mother of his, didn't he?

*O'Connor*: He did; he admired her and I think he really loved her in his own peculiar way.

*Bryson*: It would have to be peculiar for even a son to love a mother like that.

*Breit*: There's one minor character that is related to what you

said about Russia, Mr. O'Connor—and that is the great, silent, fat Uvar, the uncle, who only wiggles his fingers and says very little. He has a kind of a wisdom, a kind of a patience that Turgenev must have felt.

*Bryson:* He calls him the "dark Russian earth."

*Breit:* Yes, the man who can wait in the belief that one day great things will happen.

*Bryson:* But for me the patience of fat old Uvar is more convincing than his wisdom. Wiggling your fingers is not to me a very wise comment on life, and that's about all he ever did. Now Turgenev is surely being comic there, isn't he?

*Breit:* Oh, of course he is—and yet I don't think that Turgenev is that single-faceted.

*Bryson:* No, of course not.

*Breit:* Take his discussions with Shubin, the young sculptor, the prototype of the ineffectual artistic gentleman of that time. The old boy, Uvar, does help him a little, does calm him down and teach him to see, to wait; there is something of wisdom in that, I think.

*Bryson:* Oh yes; I'm not doubting that he had this effect. But I think it's part of Turgenev's extraordinary magic that he makes you believe that without ever having the old man do an intelligent or an intelligible thing.

*Breit:* Do you think old Uvar could have influenced Thomas Mann when he created his famous character in *The Magic Mountain*, Herr Peeperkorn? He always started out pompously but never got anywhere.

*Bryson:* And dominated the plot and captured the beautiful lady and had everything just about his own way. But I should say that he had a somewhat more violent side to him than the old uncle has. Going back to the other characters for a minute: if Insarov is the man of action that Turgenev wishes he could have been but wasn't, is Shubin the artist that he thinks he really was?

*Breit:* I think that Turgenev did lay out, or diagram, three types of Russian youth. One is Insarov, the man of action, who is actually a Bulgarian in this novel; another is Bersyenev, the kind of studious man who is good but will never accomplish very much; and then you have Shubin, who is the artistic type and is, I think, a very real worry of Turgenev's.

*O'Connor:* Undoubtedly he's read an awful lot of himself into Shubin. He is ineffectual; Turgenev does recognize that all the way through, and I think that he's probably quite correct.

*Bryson:* But I don't accept his verdict on himself, either in this book, *On the Eve*, or in any of his other novels. He holds up the man of action as the type that he wishes he could have been and that all Russians should be; but it seems to me that it's a mark of the political immaturity of Czarist Russia that they thought *any* action was better than none. It's only the very young person, really, who says "For God's sake, let's *do* something," when "doing something" is the worst thing you could possibly do—as it often is in life's crises. That's where the fat old uncle represents the basic wisdom of the Russian people, and where the excited intellectual who says "Let's do something"

may be making a mistake. Russia did something, finally. The result is not exactly what we admire. Wasn't Turgenev himself one of the very top peaks of Russian civilization? Why should he call himself ineffectual? He is certainly one of the greatest writers in Europe.

*Breit*: But very often, I think, it's characteristic of artists to feel that they aren't men of action. They worry about the frivolity of putting one word after another, of pushing a pen around; they do have a great—what is it?—a kind of anxiety about themselves.

*O'Connor*: I suppose there's a feeling of guilt behind it all, and that's very obvious in Turgenev. It's shown in this book in a most remarkable way. Although the original of Insarov was a Bulgarian poet named Katranov, Turgenev makes it clear right through the book that his fictional character, Insarov, has no taste for poetry. In other words, Turgenev couldn't possibly conceive of a hero in any novel of his who cared for such disgusting stuff as poetry. Look at Bazarov in *Fathers and Sons*: he hates poetry and thinks the old man is crazy because he reads Pushkin. Exactly the same thing is true of Jane Austen; she hated poetry in the same way and was all the time ridiculing it or attacking it.

*Bryson*: Now that's a curious jump, Mr. O'Connor, from Turgenev to Jane Austen. Will you expatiate on that?

*O'Connor*: I wonder if it really is a jump?

*Bryson*: It is at first glance.

*O'Connor*: I think, Mr. Bryson, that you and I probably like Turgenev for the same reason that we like Jane Austen: they're both artists who work within proportion and limit. They're classical artists, and I think it's partly the classic quality in both of them that links them in my mind. But there also is this peculiar thing, this hatred of poetry by a man who really adored poetry, who even wrote it, and whose own prose works are full of poetry. You asked the question earlier and I'm still wondering like old Uvar Ivanovich, I'm wiggling my fingers and wondering what the answer is: why should this peak of Russian culture feel that he was a failure in life? It's a hard question.

*Breit*: Perhaps it was a political concept that made him deprive his heroes of poetry. He saw a contradiction between the man of action and the poet, although it's a stereotyped notion. It reminded me of Lenin's once saying that he must not listen to Beethoven—that music and poetry seduced you away from your goal, distracted you dangerously. That wouldn't be true of Jane Austen, would it?

*O'Connor*: No, I think there is a difference between them. Jane Austen is afraid of poetry as a means of seduction. Turgenev is also afraid of being seduced, but in a different way. He's afraid of being seduced away from the serious business of life. I like the point you made about Lenin, because I think it's true that Turgenev had the same sort of childish intellectual attitude towards poetry.

*Bryson*: I suppose my surprise at the comparison between Turgenev and Jane Austen was based on something very superficial. Jane Austen always seems to me to be writing in the living room, while Turgenev is always writing in the forest. I mean that one is indoors and the other outdoors. One writes in the confinement of civilized

living; the other, in spite of his high civilization, is the man of the open Russian fields and forests.

*Breit*: I don't think of Turgenev in the forest so much as I do in a garden, surrounded by fountains and flowers and late-afternoon shadows.

*Bryson*: Perhaps he is big enough to give us all these various aspects of Russia, and of the world, too.

## CICERO

### On Duties

(As broadcast April 22, 1956)

MOSES HADAS • ROBERT S. MORISON, M.D. • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: Cicero was one of the world's greatest rhetoricians, and he used his rhetoric to become one of the world's greatest popularizers. We have his kind today: the person who takes great thoughts and puts them into words that are more easily understood by the common man.

*Hadas*: Yes. I think that our debt to Cicero not merely for language and oratory but for ideas is actually incalculable. I think it's interesting to note that he did this as a patriotic duty, because the Romans were not a philosophically-minded people; they didn't go in for speculative philosophy for its own sake, as the Greeks did. As a matter of fact, there's an interesting story from about a hundred years before Cicero's time. In 155 B.C. a delegation of three Greeks had come to Rome to ask for some favor. The delegation consisted of the heads of the various Greek philosophical schools. Carneades, who was the representative of the New Academy—incidentally, the school to which Cicero himself later belonged—announced that he would give a lecture on one day. All of the Roman youth flocked round, listened to him, and applauded vigorously. Then he said that if they'd all come back the following day, he would give another lecture and prove the exact reverse of what he had just proved. Whereupon the elder Cato was so outraged at this "immorality" that he stalked into the Senate and said "We've got to get rid of these people at once; tend to their business and send them home—they're corrupting the youth."

*Morison*: It's usually said, I believe, that Cicero was the one Roman who more than anyone else transmitted the Stoic tradition to the Middle Ages and to modern times. How representative is he, really, of the Stoic way? To me he seems rather different from Marcus Aurelius or Seneca, who are the other two Stoics I know most about.

*Hadas*: I think that, technically, it's actually wrong to call him a Stoic. His own affiliation was with the New Academy, whose idea

was that you could not *establish* any kind of truth, that the best you could get was probability. He didn't like the Epicureans, it's true; he says very harsh things about them. He was sympathetic to the Stoics—to their sense of duty, their sense of obligation to a mission. . .

*Bryson*: He was almost a kind of "Protestant" Stoic, wasn't he? That is, he thought that with some purification the Stoic doctrine might be pretty good.

*Hadas*: I think it's characteristic that what annoyed him about the Stoics was their impracticality; he didn't like their doctrinaire aspects.

*Bryson*: He was a Roman.

*Hadas*: He was a Roman and a lawyer. Now, a Stoic would make no difference between a felony and a misdemeanor. They were perfectionists. If you crossed the street against a red light, for example, you committed a crime; if you killed your mother you were committing a crime. Since both are crimes, they're equal. To a lawyer that's an absurd thing, naturally.

*Morison*: But, like the Stoics, he based his philosophy or his ethic primarily on a knowledge of the world and a knowledge of man, did he not?

*Bryson*: A knowledge of nature, too.

*Hadas*: Yes. The thing about the Stoics which sets them apart, I think, and which is still of value is their notion of the world's being *one*; we are all part of one another. But then you get to the impracticality of the picture: the Stoic sage is *ipso facto* a king, even though he may be a shoemaker; he is, *ipso facto*, rich. Well, Cicero was practical enough to know that if a man is penniless he is *not* rich, he is not a king.

*Bryson*: But these things are rather submerged in the letters which constitute *On Duties*; on the surface he's only writing letters to his son, who's a student at Athens.

*Hadas*: Like Lord Chesterfield.

*Bryson*: That's right—and how different! But Cicero is trying to tell his son how to be a great Roman, and the picture he draws is this modification of Stoicism. He wasn't a thoroughgoing Stoic, but there are things in Stoicism that he liked. Where did your doubts come, Dr. Morison?

*Morison*: He doesn't seem to me to have the warmth and spirituality that a person like Marcus Aurelius has. Aurelius, I think, in David Reisman's term, was a more inner-directed person. He wanted to do the right thing just purely and simply because it *was* the right thing. Cicero is more interested in what other people are going to think of him.

*Bryson*: But isn't that rather contrary to our usual thinking about the kind of fellows the Romans were? Cato is far more typical of our sentimental view of the Romans, not a voluble, vain *Italian* like Cicero. Isn't that right?

*Morison*: Yes, I think this is one of the things that bothered me as to whether he really was typical.

*Bryson*: And whether he really was talking good Stoicism.

*Hadas*: I think we are inclined to play down the Stoicism in

dealing with Cicero and to play up the practicality which is perfectly sound Romanism.

*Bryson*: I can quote you from his letters to his son, Mr. Hadas. He was practical.

*Hadas*: He was essentially a practical man. I think the problem arises, as far as morality is concerned, when you consider what your sanction ultimately is. From that point of view, a treatise like this one on moral duties is useful to us today, because we, too, question sanctions.

*Morison*: It's my impression that his principal sanction is a sense of decency or appropriateness. You study man to find out what he's like and then you try to do the things that are appropriate to being a man. He develops his whole social philosophy, it seems to me, from the idea that man is primarily a social and political animal. I think he even mentions the social insects like the bees, and that they don't get together in order to make combs, they make combs because they instinctively get together. The second great virtue, as I remember it, is justice. And by justice he really means the ordering of social relations—because under the heading of justice he takes up the matter of being generous to other people. He goes into some detail about how much money you should give if you are an *aedile*: don't give too much because it isn't quite appropriate, but still you ought to show that you have money and know how to handle it properly.

*Hadas*: But the standard of how much is appropriate, of what is proper, is regarded by the Stoics as a natural thing. Cicero's teacher, Panaetius, a man whom he is following in this treatise, makes a great play of the Greek word *kathekon*, which means "the appropriate." And when you say that this is part of the way of nature, then you have a kind of rationale for it. Your job is to determine, with the aid of the best analogies you have, what nature would demand in any case. And if you live then in accordance with nature, being a good Stoic, you will be properly generous, properly considerate of your fellow man and your family, and so on—all in due measure.

*Bryson*: It seems to me that you are saying something quite fundamental here, because aren't you really saying he believed that the greatest possibility in man was to be most essentially human? His idea of ethics and morals is completely cut off from any external sanctions, from any revelation, from any desire to be like some divine creature; this is the limit that man's own nature puts upon himself, and his greatest realization of himself is to be as human as he can be—there is no touch of the divine in him.

*Morison*: In a curious way this seems analogous to orthodox Presbyterianism. To be given grace by God is to be made a part of the same sort of universal system; if you have grace, you're under an obligation to behave in the appropriate way for a person who has grace. Do you think that this is a reasonable sort of analogy, or am I snatching at flies?

*Bryson*: I'll pass that to Mr. Hadas.

*Hadas*: The only difficulty with that analogy is that when you use the word "grace" you're invoking external power of a very high authority, you're invoking a sanction.



*Bryson*: Which Cicero never did.

*Hadas*: The key to his whole morality is found in the story of the ring of Gyges. I think it poses the most searching moral problem that any of us can be confronted with. The story, briefly, is this: here is a ring which, if a man put it on his finger and turns the bezel inside towards his palm, makes him absolutely invisible, so that he can get away with anything; he can go into anyone's strong box, he can make himself tyrant, he can enter anyone's bedchamber, he can do whatever he likes with perfect assurance that he will never be smelt out.

*Bryson*: Even if he falls over something, nobody's going to know about it.

*Hadas*: Nobody's going to know. Query: how much of our morality is due, consciously or otherwise, to a sense of fear?

*Bryson*: We don't have Gyges's ring.

*Hadas*: We say that we're being good for the sake of being good, but are we really? Rather, are we not afraid of being caught out, somehow, clever though we may be? Now if you had Gyges's ring, if you had absolute assurance that you could get away with anything, how good would you be? How much moral strength would you have with no reward or retribution for being good, no eye of deity to see what you're doing in your inward chamber? Would you still be good—and if you were, on what sanction?

*Bryson*: Would you, Dr. Morison?

*Morison*: If I were an orthodox Presbyterian I would be.

*Bryson*: Yes, of course, because the eye of God would be on you. But suppose you're just a Stoic and you don't believe in revelation?

*Morison*: This, of course, is Cicero's position. He obviously has a great deal of difficulty with this problem, if I remember it. Indeed, he discusses it briefly and says it certainly wouldn't be very nice if you went and did these things just because you had the ring. But still you wonder whether he doesn't feel that, after all, a lot of people would do it and there's not much to be done about it. He seems sort of frustrated by the story.

*Bryson*: He is frustrated and that's why I, as a teacher and a parent, think he made a great mistake to bring it up in something he was writing for his son's edification. He should never have suggested to the boy that if nobody was watching he might behave differently. It's bad pedagogy.

*Morison*: It makes me question a good deal how abstract his notion of honesty is, or at least the word that's translated as honesty here, because if one really believes in abstract honesty I think he'd want to be good whether or not someone else was looking. Just what did the Latins mean when they used this word *honestum*?

*Hadas*: I think that our old-fashioned translators trip us up, because *honestum* should not be translated as "honesty." *Honestum* is "honorable" rather than "honest."

*Bryson*: It's a wider word.

*Hadas*: Much wider. And if you're clever enough and can talk fast enough and have certain ideals about the demands of politics or the demands of the state, you can be as dishonest as all getout, perfectly black, and still be *honestum*. Which is, indeed, what he says in

the third book. *Honestum* is not honest. It's honorable, as contrasted with *utile*, the useful or expedient.

*Morison*: It seems to me, though, that being honorable is essentially an "inner-directed" thing. Raise this to an abstract level, and you'd think he'd feel that the honorable man would behave well whether or not somebody else could see him.

*Bryson*: But, Dr. Morison, he says that this behavior is a means to success. It is the way to be what you most want to be, which is a great and noble Roman. The moment you bring that in, doesn't it rather taint this idealism?

*Morison*: I really don't know whether Cicero is clear in his own mind on this point. I think he argues it one way and then another way; and then he begins to scratch his head again and thinks of Regulus, who was captured by Hannibal and sent by him to Rome to arrange an exchange of prisoners. But when he got there he told the Romans not to do it, and then, though his family and friends begged him to remain in Rome, he voluntarily went back to Hannibal and to torture.

*Bryson*: Because he had given his word.

*Morison*: Because he had given his word to the enemy. Cicero obviously admires this very much, because he comes back to it on a couple of occasions; he does seem to be thinking of honor in this sort of abstract, categorical imperative sense.

*Hadas*: Although we are not speaking of an external sanction such as you would have in Presbyterianism, there is one major premise which needs to be taken into consideration. It remains unspoken, but it is the requirements of Rome and the requirements of being a Roman. This is an ideal which I think to Cicero is so obvious that he doesn't even need to mention it. So that the story about Regulus and these other stories lack, it seems to me, one essential. It isn't merely the story of a man who had given his word and then, at the cost of great torture to himself, kept it. He's a *Roman* general who owes a great deal to the name and the dignity of Rome, and that makes a difference.

*Bryson*: Because he's an example?

*Hadas*: Yes. You cannot have the *honestum* and the *utile* on an island in isolation. All of these virtues are public virtues. It's ridiculous to talk about a man being honorable if he's by himself in this sense. He is only being honorable *qua* Roman.

*Morison*: Mr. Hadas, is there really any more lonely act than suicide? Obviously, Cicero admires suicide as Cato did it and essentially as he did it himself.

*Hadas*: Well, it depends from where you start looking. I think Cato's suicide is the most public act possible and he justifies it, in Plutarch's account of it, by saying: "This is my obligation. The world looks to me. If I were a lesser man I needn't commit suicide, but it is my obligation in this case to commit suicide." This is all public morality, and I think that's one of the things that, reading *On Duties* without a feeling of the surrounding background, gives you a false idea of the thing. There is this external sanction, if you please, of the grave responsibility of being a Roman, of fulfilling your mission as a Roman. If you want to go on and speak the language of

salvation, you could almost say that this is the way you achieve salvation—by fulfilling your mission as a Roman.

*Bryson*: You're beginning to make me doubt that Cicero could have been a Stoic, being a Roman. If Stoicism is an ideal of inner-directedness in our modern sociological term, a moral system based upon no external sanction, no revelation, no sense of the eye of God upon you, the Roman couldn't be a Stoic because he always did have the eye of Rome upon him. He *had* an external sanction.

*Hadas*: I think that is right, except for our habits of language. When we're talking of external sanctions normally, as far as ethics are concerned, we are thinking of something like the Ten Commandments, some kind of revelation.

*Bryson*: Thinking of something which is extra-human.

*Hadas*: I think perhaps that would be a better definition. No people under the sun have ever had more of a sense of obligation to their audience than the Romans. I spoke of Lord Chesterfield rather feelingly, back there, because he has the same kind of attitude. "A gentleman is not in a hurry." Well, now, why shouldn't he be if he's late for a date? Because he owes it to his audience. He cannot be seen dashing down the street; it wouldn't look dignified.

*Bryson*: All tangled up in his toga! Perhaps that was one thing that kept them dignified.

*Morison*: Something that's puzzled me a bit is how Cicero would deal with the morals of people who didn't want to be Romans. He seems to assume that everybody in the world wants to be a noble Roman, although it was obviously not possible for more than a relatively small proportion of the ancient world to be. A good many of them were slaves, of course. Does he deal anywhere with the general problem of morality, or is he only really interested in how aristocratic Romans should behave?

*Hadas*: I think, again, that we're being misled by our common notions of evangelism in general. We all think that if you've worked up an ethical code, it's a pretty good thing to go and preach it on the street corners and bring everybody in on it. But this book is directed exclusively to a special class to whom this sanction of obligation could apply. Cicero did not for a moment think that other people, the "lesser breeds without the law," would be bound by this.

*Morison*: And this, I suppose, has kept it from having a very wide appeal except in rather special circumstances. A good many of the founding fathers of the United States tended to look toward ancient Rome for their standards of conduct. Obviously, many of the leaders of the British Empire did. I think one can explain a good many of the acts of British leaders more easily on the basis of Roman models than of Christian ones.

*Bryson*: A rather special version of the Roman model, though—the Ciceronian version still further modified, purified of its Italianate quality.

*Hadas*: There have been some flamboyant speeches in the House of Commons, Mr. Bryson.

*Morison*: Indeed there have, and some that were probably just as Ciceronian as anything that Cicero ever did.

*Bryson*: But I'm suggesting that it was the Cato kind of Roman that the British set up as their ideal.

*Hadas*: As far as our own founding fathers were concerned, I think the special consideration was finding a sudden need to establish a kind of public morality without the traditional sanctions. This book is a godsend to you, if I may use a contradiction in terms.

*Bryson*: The state had to exist without the church.

*Hadas*: To find a way of insisting upon morality—and you will agree a rather high kind of public morality—argued without appeal to any supernatural authority, would be very convenient to an eighteenth-century rationalist.

*Morison*: What about today? As a person interested in the biological sciences, I think many of us have begun to worry a bit about the amount of power that has been put into our hands by the progress of science. Of course it's commonplace to talk about the sort of power which the knowledge of nuclear physics has given us, but I think this is becoming equally true in the biological sciences. Medical men have a much greater command over life and death than they've ever had before. It's become necessary, therefore, to cast about for some sort of system of morals and ethics by which we can judge decisions in the use of this scientific power. I must confess that many scientists find this difficult, because they do not feel very comfortable with the sort of supernatural sanctions which have been traditional in the western world for the last thousand years or so. Do you think it's possible that we might turn our attention toward some of the Roman types of morality and, if so, would it do us any good?

*Hadas*: Well, I would say this: we have spoken of Cicero as a Stoic—a kind of Protestant, unorthodox, deviationist Stoic but, nevertheless, a Stoic. We ought not to look at things by an absolute standard of modern notions of brotherhood and equality and so forth, but rather to look at them historically, according to the progress of the world at any given time. Now I think the magnificent thing about Stoicism, even Cicero's Stoicism, is the realization of the ecumenical ideal of the brotherhood of man, which in a practical way worked itself out in Roman law. This was an unheard of thing, actually: that a man who lived in a remote province, a man living on the Nile or the Orontes, had as much right before the law as a man who lived in the capital on the Tiber. In other words, there is an obligation to you as a member of humankind, as a part of nature. This is almost Spinoza—God or nature, Spinoza says, and this is almost the same thing. Without the supernatural sanction of a special isolated will directing you, to whom you must give an accounting, you still have an obligation towards humanity as a whole. This is the world as organized. When the question comes up to you as a practitioner of medicine whether you should or should not extend a life, this may be as good a gauge for your conduct as another. Consider all of nature: is an extension of this man's life in accordance with nature or are you going a little bit too far, performing a stunt, by keeping what ought to be a dead man alive?

*Morison*: Classically, of course, the medical man has had to give more attention to these problems of responsibility than the pure

scientist. The pure scientist has sort of gloried in the fact that he's not responsible. His only obligation is to find out things; the decision in relation to the use of that power is made by others. But I think we're coming to a point where this power is so great that the scientist himself has got to take responsibility. I think people like the Organization of Atomic Scientists, and so on, rather document this point of view; I think that they might turn to just this point—that responsibility is important, that you can't know nature without also assuming some responsibility for your relation to it.

*Bryson*: And your responsibility, Dr. Morison, would be to the whole human brotherhood and not just to some provincial Rome, even though Rome might be on top of the world?

*Hadas*: Your responsibility to all of mankind, the *oikoumené*—that is, the civilized world—is much enlarged, but for Cicero it was easier. He would, if he were a physician and were looking at an incurable case, simply ask: is this good for Rome or is it not? Do we need this man's wisdom or strength or whatever he has? And the answer could be arrived at very simply.

*Morison*: We don't have to be so overpowered by the greatness of Cicero that we can't take some of his ideas and expand them into a wider sense of responsibility than that merely of ancient Rome.

*Bryson*: I should think one of your problems, Dr. Morison, as you put it, would be to decide whether you are working with nature or against nature. Because, after all, the very essence of your art as a physician is to interfere or intervene, let's say, with some of the processes of nature.

*Morison*: Or to help them along.

*Bryson*: Or to help them along in order to accomplish the purpose that otherwise would not have been achieved.

*Morison*: A discussion of this would get us into a conflict of principles; obviously conflicts of principles disturbed Cicero, and they disturb me even more.

*Bryson*: They disturb everybody, Dr. Morison, but I think the debt that we owe to Cicero today is probably very much the same debt that the whole Middle Ages owed him: that he had the capacity to state these problems so that nobody can escape their meaning and everybody feels that he ought to try to solve them.

# GEOFFREY CHAUCER

## *Troilus and Cressida*

(As broadcast April 29, 1956)

BERGEN EVANS

•

W. CABELL GREET

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* There are few contrasts any greater than that between the book everyone knows Chaucer for, *The Canterbury Tales*, and this *Troilus and Cressida*, which is an old story and of which his is only one of the many versions, though probably the best. There must be some reason why there have been so many versions of it?

*Greet:* It's a great love story that somehow in its bare outlines has meaning for everybody. Boccaccio tells it extremely well in an Italian manner; Shakespeare takes it from Chaucer; Dryden reworks it again; and Christopher Morley, as you may remember, retold it about thirty years ago in the hope that it would attract modern Americans.

*Evans:* The story will go on being retold as long as human beings are recognizably human, as long as you have "boy meets girl, girl leaves boy."

*Bryson:* Note that it's "boy meets girl, girl leaves boy." It's not quite the Hollywood version of "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back."

*Evans:* Chaucer is nearer the truth than Hollywood.

*Bryson:* We always lose our first love?

*Evans:* Oh, don't you think that a young, ardent boy is likely to fall in love with a more sophisticated, mature woman at first because she alone will remove the barriers of his timidity and self-consciousness? Sooner or later, a woman of that kind will tire of mere ardor.

*Bryson:* I should think this is one of the first times that a poet or story-teller made the *man* the innocent, sensitive one. It's a commonplace situation in life, but it doesn't often happen in a romance.

*Evans:* I defer to Mr. Greet's much fuller knowledge, but I'm under the impression that Chaucer was carried away by a sort of sympathy for Cressida, wasn't he? In retelling it, doesn't he make her a more central figure in the story than she had been?

*Greet:* He does. But to go back to Mr. Bryson's point: the romantic hero is always a man of feeling and sentiment.

*Bryson:* Yes, but the romantic heroine is not always a deceiver!

*Evans:* I don't think Cressida is a deceiver.

*Bryson:* She isn't exactly, but I think we have to explain why not. After all, she did go away and she didn't come back. By the way, when did this story first turn up in western literature, anyway? You two scholars ought to be able to answer that. It certainly is not part of the old Homeric stories about Troy, although it's laid in Troy during the Trojan war.

*Evans:* No, *Troilus* is not in Homer. I'm not sure exactly when the story first appeared.

*Greet*: 1160 is the accepted date.

*Evans*: Did someone just make it up then?

*Greet*: Yes; a Frenchman named Benoît de Sainte-Maure composed a verse history of Troy in, as I remember, something like twelve thousand lines.

*Bryson*: That's the main reason why it's forgotten!

*Greet*: And in this long poem he introduces the story of Troilus. He didn't call the girl Cressida (or Cryseyde in Chaucer's orthography), he called her Briseida. And he began the story with Briseida's leaving her lover in Troy.

*Bryson*: He began with the desertion. Boccaccio, who changed the girl's name to Griseida, added a little romance before the betrayal. And Chaucer, when it came his turn, put the two things together. But what is this story actually?

*Greet*: In the story as Chaucer tells it there is this young prince, Troilus, a noble and valiant soldier of Troy. . .

*Bryson*: One of the "noble sons of Priam"?

*Greet*: Yes. He is second only to Hector in his strength, his virtue, his honor as a knight—but he has never been in love. He's scornful of it. But one Sunday he goes to church. . .

*Bryson*: *That* doesn't sound much like Troy.

*Evans*: It sounds like the Annunziata in Florence. That's where it occurs for me—not for Chaucer, of course—and I see him looking over the young girls, eyeing "the beauties of the Trojan town."

*Greet*: In Krapp's translation,

. . . And thus his roving eye, by chance no doubt,  
Passed o'er the crowd and reached the very spot  
Where Cressida stood, and then no further got.

*Evans*: Cupid takes his revenge and shoots him through the heart (this thing is full of all the old devices).

*Bryson*: And who was Cressida?

*Evans*: Cressida's father, Calchas, was a Trojan priest. From his auguries he learned that Troy was about to fall, and so he left town and went over to the Greeks. But he departed in such a hurry that he left his daughter and his palace and his furniture behind.

*Greet*: He reminds me of the line from *The Ingoldsby Legends*:

Although he was an augur,  
He really was a bore.

*Evans*: And a traitor, too.

*Bryson*: Yes, but in those times one changed sides with a fairly easy conscience. He is not made out to be a despicable character just because he decided to get out of town when he saw disaster coming.

*Greet*: Oh, no—in fact, he's shown as a loving father, worried about leaving his widowed daughter Cressida alone in a threatened city. And as soon as he was among the Greeks he set machinery in motion to bring her to him.

*Bryson*: But by this time she and Troilus have fallen in love—

with the help of one of her relatives, who rejoices in the name of Pandarus.

*Greet:* And Pandarus, as Chaucer conceives him, is believable and, I think, honorable. I don't believe Chaucer intended him to be anything else.

*Bryson:* Our word "pander," which of course comes from this old story, is not quite fair to Cressida's uncle?

*Evans:* No, not quite.

*Bryson:* Nevertheless, he does bring the two young lovers together. He's a matchmaker.

*Evans:* Chaucer seems to go out of his way to stress the fact that Pandarus does it out of love for Troilus. He's much more concerned about Troilus than he is about his niece.

*Bryson:* But the modern reader is very likely to ask at this point: why didn't they just get married?

*Evans:* That would have violated the tradition of romantic love, but I also think there's a deeper reason. As I've felt on rereading this story, the fate of the lovers is part of the fate of Troy. Troy is doomed, they are doomed. Suppose they had been married? They would have both been killed when the city was taken, or she would have been sold into captivity. Death hovers over them. That is part of the enclosing circle of tragedy that surrounds them. It seems to me that Chaucer dramatizes that by not having them even think of marriage.

*Greet:* This is a story of love; and I think it is sound from an artistic point of view that, if you are telling the story of a human emotion, you will not complicate it by too many other considerations.

*Bryson:* One of the most cynical speeches I ever heard in my life, Mr. Greet! You mean that if you have an honest emotion, it can't possibly result in a happy ending?

*Greet:* Not at all. But if you are telling a story of knighthood, it should be primarily of battles, and if you are telling a story of love, it is well to keep the relatives out of the picture.

*Bryson:* Well, Pandarus comes into the picture and brings the two young lovers together. They're happy for a time. But then the father, who's over in the Greek camp, intervenes and has his daughter torn from the arms of Troilus and brought as a kind of hostage to the Greeks.

*Greet:* He sends as his emissary Diomedes, who is a wonderful contrast to Troilus. Diomedes is as much a man of the world as Cressida had been a woman of the world. He is a mature man; this ardent, passionate, anguished boy doesn't stand much chance with her once Diomedes shows up.

*Bryson:* And Chaucer doesn't condemn Cressida for deciding, after she gets into the Greek camp, that she prefers the man of the world to the passionate boy.

*Evans:* I think he feels she has no choice, that things too big for her swept over her. She was no match for Diomedes.

*Bryson:* Don't you think that today he would have said "This is bigger than both of us"?

*Greet:* I hope not!



*Evans:* Would you agree with me that Chaucer didn't feel that Cressida was as deeply in love as Troilus? She didn't suffer quite as much anguish.

*Bryson:* That is partly because of what you mentioned before: that she is the older, or quite possibly not the older but certainly the more experienced, more sophisticated person, and she recognizes this affair for what it is.

*Greet:* Chaucer says that she's perfect in every way except that she was inconstant—not light, but not capable of sustaining an emotion for too long.

*Evans:* She keeps writing to Troilus, telling him that she will come back some day, although she knows in her heart that she won't. And at the same time she excuses herself by saying (in Krapp's translation):

*And since my former guilt I can't undo,  
To Diomede at least I shall be true.*

*Bryson:* But aren't we giving the impression here that she seems a little thinner, as we're describing her, than Chaucer really paints her? After all, this is a poem of the most astonishing subtlety and sophistication.

*Evans:* Yes. I welcome the opportunity to remove the effects of my levity a moment ago because it is a deeply passionate poem and a deeply moving one.

*Bryson:* His feeling for her is there in the poem.

*Evans:* And yet the levity is in Chaucer; he couldn't keep cheerfulness out. It keeps breaking in all the time, you know.

*Greet:* One of the things that charmed me most in rereading the story is that I had forgotten how wonderfully homely it is—how Chaucer had imposed his own shrewd, humorous, tolerant, pure. . .

*Bryson:* English!

*Greet:* . . . gentle *English* self on this romantic story.

*Bryson:* Yes, he imposes it both on the Italian Renaissance, from which he got the story, and on the Trojan wars.

*Greet:* When Pandarus brings the lovers together in his house at night, a great smoky rain came up. And Chaucer has Pandarus say:

*Lord, this is a huge rayn!  
This were a weder for to slepen inne!*

*Bryson:* I suspect the smoky rain was more London than it was Troy.

*Greet:* One dates the poem by this smoky rain, which actually fell on England. But I love to go back to these wonderful little touches, such as when Pandarus says (this is in Krapp's translation):

*There comes a fitting time for everything,  
And when a room's afire or a hall,  
It's better folk at once some help should bring,  
Than stand and argufy amongst them all,  
'How chanced this candle in the straw to fall?'*

*Bryson:* This constantly pervasive wit is typical of Chaucer. And, of course, it is one of the things that he put into the story; it's certainly not in the versions before him and, unfortunately, it rather drops out by the time you get to Shakespeare's version. How much of it is in the turn of phrase?—because, of course, the modern person can't read Chaucer in the original Middle English.

*Evans:* I tell my students they can learn it in twenty minutes and they don't believe me.

*Bryson:* But isn't it true that you have to *look* at it rather than listen to it?

*Evans:* I don't know. I think when properly read one should listen to it.

*Bryson:* Of course Mr. Greet would read it with great propriety and accuracy, but I get it better when I look at it than when I try to pronounce it. The pronunciation tends to distract me.

*Greet:* There's a very easy rule: pronounce the vowels as if they were French and the consonants as English consonants. At the beginning of the book there's a wonderful passage on pronunciation by Chaucer himself:

*Ye knowe eek, that in forme of speche is chaunge  
With-inne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho  
That hadden prys, now wonder nyce and straunge  
Us thinketh hem; and yet they spake hem so,  
And spedde as wel in love as men now do;  
Eek for to winne love in sondry ages,  
In sondry londes, sondry been usages.*

*Bryson:* It sounds a little like a Dublin Irishman speaking English. Even into your own good Texas-American there comes an Irish flavor when you read this.

*Greet:* Dryden said that it had the music of a rude Scotch tune.

*Bryson:* Well, it's Celtic. But let me read that same passage from the translation into modern English done by George Philip Krapp, which seems to me to show the difference between what Chaucer said and what the modern translator makes him say today:

*Remember in the forms of speech comes change  
Within a thousand years, and words that then  
Were well esteemed, seem foolish now and strange;  
And yet they spake them so, time and again,  
And thrived in love as well as any men;  
And so to win their loves in sundry days,  
In sundry lands there are as many ways.*

Now Professor Krapp gets out of that a good deal of the Chaucerian swing. I will say, though, that you ought to spend this twenty minutes Mr. Evans says is all that's necessary to read Chaucer in the original. But if you can't do that, Krapp comes about as close as anybody to giving you the meaning if not the sound.

*Evans*: I would like to interpose two comments on that passage to see if I have your agreement or your amusement. It seems to me there are two very profound things in it, in addition to what it says on the surface. He does not say that men once spoke in a strange language; he doesn't recognize it as a foreign language, he just says that speech has changed; and then he also says the ultimate end of language is to make love—both of which seem to me very interesting.

*Bryson*: Yes, very interesting and very Chaucerian and very Renaissance.

*Greet*: Chief Justice Holmes loved Chaucer very much and insisted that it's nearer the America of our day than it is to Victorian London or to any other time since Chaucer's own. The professors mislead us all by saying that you have to study it. I say: pick up Chaucer, read it, and you'll realize that it's simply regular verse; pronounce as you please and you will still get pleasure out of it.

*Evans*: But I know very well after ten years of teaching it, Professor Greet, that they *won't* pick it up.

*Bryson*: It's too bad that they won't, because I think Holmes was right about it. It seems to me that Chaucer in this poem—in *The Canterbury Tales*, too—is really, as he says, closer to our time than to the Elizabethans.

*Greet*: He's closer to the permanent in human experience.

*Bryson*: Than the Elizabethans?

*Evans*: Well, let me give you a comparison of Chaucer and the Elizabethans. When Lear is dying they say:

*Vex not his ghost: O! let him pass! he hates him  
That would upon the rack of this tough world  
Stretch him out longer.*

But Chaucer says:

*Such is the world! Wherever you behold,  
The common state of man is one of woe,  
And in the end, we all must take it so!*

It's much more restrained. Chaucer doesn't see the world as a torture instrument; life has its pains, but it's not torture. I think he would have found that speech from *Lear* excessive.

*Bryson*: Whenever he himself tends toward excess, because of his great poetic invention and his great facility with words, he seems to tell himself "Now wait a minute—don't be silly!" and to draw back.

*Evans*: Or take Hamlet's words:

*Absent thee from felicity for awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain . . .*

Now, the beauty of Shakespeare's lines leads us to accept a grossly excessive idea—that death is felicity and that to go on living is pain. Chaucer would not have accepted that, I am sure. At the most dra-

matic moment of his story he says: "Troilus might go pipe on an ivy leaf." That is, for all the good it will do he might as well put a blade of grass between his thumbs and make an absurd noise.

*Bryson:* But he does something else that I'd like to ask you to justify or explain, if you can. After he's given this wonderfully subtle, sophisticated, and pervasively witty picture of what happens to all men—things don't come out quite as they expect—he just retreats into Christian fortitude. He says that, after all, we're compensated in heaven. Did he believe it?

*Evans:* Many people might question your use of the word "just."

*Bryson:* I mean only that he dodges the problem as capable of solution on earth. He says: "This is the way life is. We can't really do anything about it. We must accept a transcendental solution." The Greeks wouldn't have looked for a transcendental solution, but Chaucer does.

*Evans:* I don't believe that a fourteenth century man, however learned, could ultimately say anything else or think of saying anything else.

*Bryson:* Do you think he believed it?

*Greet:* Oh, yes, I think so. All Christians believed it.

*Evans:* And Chaucer was a Christian.

*Bryson:* I'm not saying that he didn't believe it, but it's a little surprising because it doesn't seem quite to derive from his point of view. It seems to derive, rather, out of the moral atmosphere in which he lived, which always raises the question: is he merely making a conventional declaration of piety or is he really solving in his own mind the problem of life's tragedy?

*Greet:* Well, he is not a systematic theologian or philosopher.

*Evans:* Again and again, in the poems, Chaucer will come to some philosophical problem and will carry skepticism almost to its extreme limits, and then he will do just what he's done here. He will stop and say "Nonetheless, there is a Christian solution to this."

*Bryson:* Perhaps he hated excess in skepticism as he hated excess in everything else.

*Evans:* That well may be, yes.

*Greet:* I think the creative people today who remind me most of Chaucer are Rodgers and Hammerstein. Think of the best moments in *South Pacific*, the best moments in *The King and I*—the mingling of humor and wisdom and tolerance, the dislike of intolerance or narrowness. That's the mood of Chaucer expressed with wit and music. Of course he didn't have Richard Rodgers to provide the accompaniment, but the whole ideal of our musical comedy seems to me to be Chaucerian.

*Evans:* I hadn't thought of it, but I think I would agree.

*Bryson:* And that's why we say he's modern, Mr. Greet?

*Greet:* That's one reason, I think. Another is his liking for the wisecrack.

*Bryson:* But how much of the wit can we get with an imperfect knowledge of his language? Because that's the thing that seems to me to fall out when one reads the translation, even a good translation like

George Philip Krapp's. And without the wit you are getting only second-rate Chaucer.

*Greet*: Yes, that's true—but everyone should learn to read Chaucer. I think it's very easy to read and I think it can be taught in the schools very quickly. Young people love it. I can testify to that: they love Chaucer.

*Evans*: It seems to me he summarizes his whole point of view in that wonderful line, "In each estate is little heart's rest." It's gentle, sad, but stoical as well; there are no wild excesses in the man at all. I'm probably inclined to wild excesses myself, but I admire those who don't have them.

*Bryson*: He is, if anything, as far from the Greek spirit as one could get, although a lot of the manners of antiquity are reflected in this—the lovers' difficulty in finding a place to be alone, which is so characteristic of classical times, and so on. All of that is there, but it's only superficial. Actually, the man is about as little Greek as one could be. He's very definitely English—the Renaissance Englishman, touched of course, by Mediterranean civilization.

*Greet*: Yes. William Michael Rosetti, Dante Gabriel's brother, made a parallel edition of Boccaccio's *Filostrato* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida*. The difference between the Italian gentleman and scholar and the English gentleman and scholar is quite remarkable and grand.

*Bryson*: I hope people will have the courage to go and dig Chaucer out for themselves and let him show them what he can do.

## WILLIAM JAMES

### Principles of Psychology

(As broadcast May 6, 1956)

IRVING LORGE

• ERNEST NAGEL •

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: In one way, you can look at William James not as a scientist or as a philosopher but just as a literary man. Certainly much of his impact, in his own time, came from his extraordinary brilliance and versatility and flexibility as a writer, regardless of what he was writing about.

*Nagel*: There's no doubt about that. His personality comes through the printed page; you cannot help being attracted to him, no matter what subject he writes about, simply because of the quality of his style.

*Bryson*: He's a very ingratiating personality even though he infuriates you sometimes.

*Lorge*: Oh, I think that he has left his imprint on all of our think-

ing by the very way that he turned a phrase, the way he used these homely and concrete examples in his writing. Just reading a bit of him gives you the flavor of the man as a writer.

*Nagel*: What has been said of Shakespeare is also true of James: you read him now and you think of it as a book of quotations, because so many of these things have become embedded in our common language.

*Bryson*: I'm going to ask Mr. Lorge, as a working psychologist, whether that isn't one of the things that we ought to regret in James? Because whenever he made a mistake, he stated it with such charm and eloquence and persuasiveness that it stuck in the science.

*Lorge*: This is the inevitable consequence of being a superb writer. A large number of people still believe that older people can't learn, because James said it so exactly and so superbly. He said that no man ought to expect to learn a language after twenty.

*Bryson*: And I suppose, in spite of everything that Thorndike and Lorge have done, people still believe that.

*Lorge*: Oh, a lot of people believe it. As a matter of fact, it's taken almost thirty years for us to disabuse some people. But there again James, I think, would have been the first to recognize the evidence.

*Bryson*: Aren't you saying something very important about James as a philosopher and psychologist? He never turned away from evidence.

*Lorge*: Never, although occasionally he resented the kind of evidence that he had to use.

*Nagel*: I wonder whether we couldn't exhibit his style and at the same time, perhaps, indicate what was so revolutionary about his book by taking a few lines from the very first chapter?

*Bryson*: Do you think this will do both?

*Nagel*: Yes, I'm quite convinced—because there's an important point made in the very first chapter which indicates the position of James on the contemporary scene. I think that the following couple of paragraphs are an excellent sample of James at his best—his colloquialism, his homely illustrations, his ability to use examples of this sort to make a very fundamental point. In his first chapter he talks about the scope of psychology. He contrasts the inanimate with the animate, particularly the human, and then he says:

*If some iron filings be sprinkled on a table and a magnet brought near them, they will fly through the air for a certain distance and stick to its surface. A savage seeing the phenomenon explains it as the result of an attraction or love between the magnet and the filings. But let a card cover the poles of the magnet, and the filings will press forever against its surface without its ever occurring to them to pass around its sides and thus come into more direct contact with the object of their love . . .*

*If now we pass from such actions as these to those of living things, we notice a striking difference. Romeo wants Juliet as the filings want the magnet; and if no obstacles intervene he moves*

*towards her by as straight a line as they. But Romeo and Juliet, if a wall be built between them, do not remain idiotically pressing their faces against its opposite sides like the magnet and the filings with the card. Romeo soon finds a circuitous way, by scaling the wall or otherwise, of touching Juliet's lips directly. With the filings the path is fixed; whether it reaches the end depends on accidents. With the lover it is the end which is fixed, the path may be modified indefinitely.*

That seems to me to be a brilliant illustration of James's style as well as to convey a very important point: psychology is to be analyzed from the point of view of the human being as a creature who is directed toward achieving certain ends. It is, perhaps, what is technically called a teleological conception of a human being.

*Bryson:* But "teleological" is almost a dirty word among scientists, Mr. Nagel.

*Nagel:* Well, it is certainly in very bad odor—and with reason, I think.

*Bryson:* "Teleological" meaning, of course, that there is some definite design and purpose in nature, and that everything moves to work toward that end. It's the opposite of deterministic.

*Nagel:* Yes, of course.

*Bryson:* And most scientists are determinists, aren't they?

*Lorge:* I think most are, although I must say that when I studied psychology, teleology was not only acceptable but very good theory.

*Bryson:* And you're much too young to have studied it before William James. This book is a most curious mixture of philosophy, as we call it now, and psychology, as we call it now; why was it a pioneer work in the scientific approach to human behavior?

*Lorge:* Oh, I think it's the first time that you really get a conceptualization of man being moved to action in terms of what has happened to his brain. It's a neurological concept without being atomistic. He is *not* saying "if this thing is touched, then the man will move in exactly this way."

*Bryson:* What we now would call an electronic brain. *That* isn't what we are; our brain is something different from that.

*Lorge:* He rejects the "electronic brain" concept completely—I think that's fairly safe, isn't it?

*Nagel:* Yes, I think so. As I read the history of thought, particularly the history of thought in America, it seems to me that the importance of James's *Psychology* is that it was the first systematic use of evolutionary theory as a basis for developing a science of man.

*Bryson:* But this was a long time after Darwin had startled the world—almost a generation, at any rate. Were the psychologists so slow in seeing that man's relation to the rest of the animal world had something to do with the way he behaved psychologically?

*Nagel:* It takes a long time for fundamental ideas to percolate. What James stressed was that the conscious life of man was to be regarded as an instrument in the evolutionary process of man. And his whole conception of the function of the brain and the nature of

thought was, I think, controlled by that assumption. This obviously had a great many further consequences, as subsequent history has shown.

*Lorge:* You must remember the climate of opinion in which James was working.

*Bryson:* In the 1880s?

*Lorge:* Well, the late seventies, as a matter of fact. I think he was about forty-five when he wrote the book. He had already obtained a medical degree and was very much interested in physiology. His courses at Harvard were in physiological psychology, and in them he was relating psychological behavior to the physiology of the organism. Now that was part of it. The other part of it is that the concepts of Darwin were only slowly emerging. After all, it was Galton, as a lineal descendant of the Darwinian concept, who began to perform experiments to illustrate the relationship of Darwin's thinking to psychological behavior. As you know, James uses Galton's work rather brilliantly.

*Nagel:* There's another aspect of James's work that perhaps requires a good deal of emphasis. He used the evolutionary concept and this neurological background for understanding human behavior in order to do away with a sort of a radical dualism between the mind and the body; that is, he did not require—as a great many psychologists and philosophers in the past have required—the assumption of some sort of soul or “ghost in the machine” which pulls the strings.

*Bryson:* He was always trying to exorcise that ghost, but he never quite succeeded.

*Nagel:* No, James was not a consistent thinker—partly because he saw a good deal, perhaps partly because he couldn't reconcile some of his personal feelings and leanings with his commitment to a scientific approach.

*Bryson:* After all, he was a product of Puritan New England, which meant that a good deal of the Puritan theology stuck in his mind along with Puritan moral attitudes. Isn't that right?

*Nagel:* Oh, that's exhibited frequently throughout the book. Every once in a while he delivers little sermons; and there are some very famous ones, indeed—as in the chapter on habit, where, after discussing the nature of habit on this neurological basis, he reflects in a rather wise way about the role that it plays in the life of the individual and the life of society.

*Bryson:* He's a man who was trained as a physician, who was trying to bring the ideas of evolution into our thought about human behavior, and who was trying to relate overt behavior to what happens in our nervous system. Wouldn't you expect him, then, to be very interested in experiment? And yet he was not an experimentalist.

*Lorge:* You would expect him to be, but I think that you have to see James in terms of his setting. In the United States at that time there were practically no psychological laboratories as such, and those that existed in Germany were interested only in making very specialized and exact measurements. They would make a hundred or a thousand observations to try to find out whether a person would react



faster to a light signal or to a sound signal. James couldn't see that. But he does use this information as a scientist would; he respects it for what it is, even though he can't see himself collecting it. I think part of that is due to the fact that he was interested in thinking through the process of consciousness as it happened to Mr. James.

*Nagel*: I wonder how much experimental work James *could* have conducted? I understand that he received an appropriation of three hundred dollars from Harvard University to set up a psychological laboratory. How far do you think you could get with that?

*Bryson*: How far could you go in your laboratory, Mr. Lorge, on three hundred dollars? Till next Tuesday?

*Lorge*: I think that would just begin to touch the overhead. Perhaps this isn't quite fair; it wasn't that so little money was available, it's that the spirit of the times was antagonistic to experimenting with human beings. It was legitimate for a physiologist to experiment with humans, or more particularly with excised nerve or muscle. But the idea of using a human as a reagent for an experiment in behavior . . .

*Bryson*: That is, to do something to a human being in order to measure and observe what he does. Was it invading human dignity—is that what they would have said?

*Lorge*: I think James would have thought so.

*Nagel*: There's certainly some basis for your remark, Mr. Lorge, because I think James was temperamentally disinclined to do that sort of thing. There's a very fetching remark that he made about some of the experimental work that was going on in Germany. He said: "Only people who cannot be bored would undertake to do any experiments of this sort."

*Bryson*: And yet in a number of fields, which you could enumerate much more adequately than I, he made not only profound but prophetic observations. Was this entirely by introspection and from reading what other people had done, or are we dealing here with a first-rate mind that just somehow manages to do these things?

*Lorge*: You can't read James without feeling that you're really in touch with a first-rate mind. I must say for myself, after rereading this book . . .

*Bryson*: All 1,400 pages of it, Mr. Lorge?

*Lorge*: I may have skipped a page here and there, Mr. Bryson. But the pages I skipped are the pages where he quoted a lot of other people. I did not skip anything, I think, that James himself wrote. But the thing that I'm intrigued with, after thirty years, is how much of what we now are beginning to reconceptualize in psychology is already there. In the chapter on instinct, for instance, his observations are not those that he made himself, but are his thinking-through of what other people have written, and then saying what this means. Of course the big problem for James, as it is for modern psychology, is *why* is it that anybody learns anything?

*Nagel*: Apart from the chapter on instinct, which has had a sort of revival, there are other things in this book which have an even greater fame or notoriety. I'm thinking particularly of the famous

chapter on emotions, where James attempted to explain the occurrence of emotions in terms of the behavior of the body, so that he saw emotions simply as being the consequences of certain organic and perhaps visual activities.

*Bryson*: Yes. As it's ordinarily interpreted, James, supported by the German, Lange, says "you run and then discover that you're scared." Not that you're scared first and then run.

*Nagel*: He was, by the way, shrewd enough to point out that this is his introspection—a very difficult thing to capture introspectively—and said "I don't know quite how to do the experiments to prove it." Of course, nowadays we do have some experimental evidence to show that the bodily change comes first and then the feeling of emotion.

*Bryson*: You jump first and then you discover that you're in danger.

*Lorge*: Well, you do more than that. That is, something happens before you jump: your respiration changes, your blood pressure changes, your glands react in a new way. Then you jump, and *then* you know that you're scared.

*Nagel*: Mr. Lorge, how important do you consider the train of evidence that James himself used? When, for example, he consulted actors to determine whether they went through certain motions and then developed corresponding emotional states, or whether they sort of willed themselves to have certain emotional attitudes and then acted in accordance with them.

*Bryson*: Whether the gesture came first and the emotion came after, as in his theory, or whether you felt the emotion and then interpreted the gesture.

*Lorge*: As a matter of fact, he distinguishes in the book between two classes of actors—those actors who can intellectualize the projection of emotion, and those who apparently must feel it in order to project it. And he tries to make the general point that the good actor is the one who goes through the bodily changes before he can really project. As a matter of fact, this is still one of the current controversies about acting techniques. But I would say that it gives you a strange feeling that James had reached a very substantial conclusion about behavior, and that he was now collecting evidence to bolster his particular belief. And while he does quote evidence that contradicts his theory, he describes it as "bad" evidence.

*Nagel*: Yes, indeed. Of course, I think this is very sound procedure: you start off with a hunch and then you look for evidence to support it or perhaps contradict it. I don't believe James himself would have held a position that he thought was incompatible with the available evidence. But still he was very judicious in examining the various claims that had been made; and so there's a tremendous amount of polemic in the book, the sort of thing that I don't think you'll find in most treatises on psychology today—perhaps because nobody can afford to write as spaciouly as James did. After all, it was in the nineteenth century and not in the mid-twenties that he was writing.

*Bryson*: He wrote very copiously. As a matter of fact, nowadays

he seems almost to have told you too often what it is that he's trying to tell you in the first place. This polemic quality, this capacity for dramatizing his differences is, of course, a literary advantage, but I wonder whether it's a scientific or a philosophical one. He sometimes seems to sink to the level of saying "I can't quite prove this fellow's wrong, but I know he's a fool and therefore he must be wrong." He doesn't quite go that far, but he comes close to it.

*Nagel*: Frequently he does, and this adds a great deal to the charm of the book.

*Bryson*: Charm, yes, but what about science?

*Nagel*: Of course there's a certain price that you have to pay for conducting research in the way we have become accustomed to: much of the dramatic quality disappears. And although I for my part applaud this, I regret that current investigators don't write as well as James. I recall a remark by a very eminent mathematician that today mathematicians write with an eye on the printer rather than on the reader—to spare the printer effort instead of the reader. Well, I think perhaps psychologists have a tendency to do that, too.

*Lorge*: But, Mr. Nagel, when you get a bill for a manuscript today you realize that the printer really is much too expensive to be ignored.

*Nagel*: I suppose only Winston Churchill can afford to write in the old way.

*Lorge*: I think you have to see William James in terms of his time. I can still remember with great vividness reading Karl Pearson and recognizing how polemic he was.

*Bryson*: But succinct, too.

*Lorge*: Succinct and polemic and argumentative, all at the same time. He not only was writing to elucidate an idea but, more than that, to prove himself ultimately right. I'm talking about Karl Pearson. Now, occasionally, you get the same feeling out of James—that he is interested in proving himself right. As a matter of fact, you know the technique that he uses: he simply says "Argument," repeats the argument in very succinct form, and then gives a long and devastating reply to it. But his is an armchair argument.

*Nagel*: After all, the psychology of the time was an armchair psychology; many of the problems that were discussed were in a certain sense dialectical problems, problems which required simply an analysis of concepts. A good deal of this book, I think, is devoted to analyzing concepts.

*Bryson*: Wouldn't you say that one has to decide whether his ideas about instinct, his ideas about the relation between nerves and the emotions, his ideas about the relation between the attention and the will—whether these things have been proved by the more empiric practices of modern psychology, so that now they are substantial scientific conclusions? If so, then he's a great prophet.

*Nagel*: I think a good deal of the polemic in the book is directed against a sort of old-fashioned "faculty" psychology, so that his long chapter on the will is devoted to showing that it's unnecessary to sup-

pose that there's such an entity as a will which pulls the strings. The polemic, then, is understandable and I think extremely excusable.

*Lorge*: That's the point that I wanted to make. After I read the book, I was impressed with the grand conception of it. A modern psychological treatise deals with minutiae, with little, little bits. He dares to start with a grand conception, and brings together about it a tremendous sweep of information. More than that, once he has taken the step, he gets *all* of the evidence. When he quotes, he quotes voluminously—he's just as prolix in his quotations as he is in his own writing. He was enough of a teacher to know that you tell the student to go and read Sully or Bain, but the student won't look up the book; therefore he includes it on the spot—at the moment when the student is really interested in it.

*Nagel*: If I may make a remark here in my capacity as a professional philosopher, it seems to me that there are some grounds for deploring the separation of philosophy and psychology. This is now standard in all colleges and universities, but at one time psychology and philosophy were in the same department. As a matter of fact, at our own university—Columbia—the department of psychology, which used to be in the faculty of philosophy, has been moved into the faculty of pure science.

*Bryson*: They used to be in the same classroom—in the same head, so to speak.

*Nagel*: Now it seems to me that James's undertaking should be attempted at least once in a while; there ought to be someone to map out the territory, to indicate where all these minutiae fit in. That is what is frequently lacking—at least to an outsider in the profession.

*Bryson*: You're a more critical consumer than I am, but I'm a consumer too. Has anybody done it since James?

*Lorge*: Oh yes, I think so. I don't think they've done it as well. For instance, I do think that William McDougall, in the late twenties, did something of this kind; he had the grand concept, although his ideas were not the same. I think that a large amount of what now goes by the name of "experimental psychology" is really trying to prove James either right or wrong. But he had the daring. Here are the hypotheses—they may not be right, but they're brilliant conceptions—and what you now try to do is to collect the evidence for this, that, or the other doctrine. And, of course, his chapters on instinct and on habit have become basic to a fundamental psychology of learning.

*Nagel*: One thing that also impresses me on reading James is how many different schools have emerged from this one volume. I mean that the behaviorists and the functionalists and the Gestaltists and perhaps even the psychoanalysts can, in some form or other, regard James as their father. It seems to me that James's was a seminal mind.

*Bryson*: It certainly was a seminal mind, and we have Mr. Lorge as a working psychologist to say that it was seminal scientifically as well as philosophically. I'd like to say as just a consumer of literature that this book is still wonderfully worth reading. I can't tell, naturally, whether or not it's still good psychology, but it's literature in any case.

# PLATO

## The Laws

(As broadcast May 13, 1956)

THOMAS RITCHIE ADAM • CHARLES FRANKEL • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* This "other" book is an old man's book, an old man likely to be wise and disappointed and tolerant and stubborn at the same time. It's pure Plato, but it's Plato in the shadow, as he was getting ready to bid goodbye to a world he couldn't make over the way he had hoped he could.

*Frankel:* I think that's right. What Plato says he's trying to do, and he says it quite explicitly, is to create a "second-best" state. He's given up the idea he had in *The Republic* of rubbing the slate clean, as it were, and building a perfect society in the image of divine reason. He's going to try in *The Laws* to solve a problem he'd left untouched in *The Republic*—namely, where does law come in? Where does convention come in? Where does the whole texture of ordinary use and wont and common experience fit in when you're trying to construct a state?

*Bryson:* He actually sets out to tell how a state should be founded.

*Frankel:* Yes, the dialogue itself is constructed on that basis. He's talking to a Cretan who is going out to start a colony and he's giving him advice on the best way to begin.

*Adam:* This is Plato with a practical purpose. Perhaps for that reason he's not so recognizable as a philosopher.

*Bryson:* Philosophers *don't* have practical purposes, Mr. Adam?

*Adam:* To a poor bricklayer of politics, arranging people so that they can live in the world as it exists is more the purpose of social philosophers or social scientists. Plato here tackled the problem that is so interesting to us today: what is the purpose and the meaning of law and force? Can he use it to reach his fine, high ends, or must he neglect it altogether and go back only to wishing that man would change his nature?

*Bryson:* What about this "second-best" business?

*Adam:* Well, it's always second-best for people to be human; the best is for people to stop being human and become those immortal creatures that we all hope to be some day.

*Frankel:* I think, however, that Plato's very notion that he is dealing with something second-best affects the quality of the dialogue. One has the feeling that his heart isn't quite in it, the way it was in *The Republic*. Nevertheless, the things he says in it are, most of them, absorbing, some of them a little frightening, and some of them full of—oh, alert psychological insights that we can use today. I liked especially his advice to young men on how they ought to learn to hold their liquor. Even that's part of the plan in building a state.

*Bryson*: Yes, as a matter of fact, we might undertake to remind Mr. Adam, an expert on British politics, that the house party by which they train British civil servants is foreshadowed in *The Laws*. Plato actually says that the best way to understand a man is to see him in his cups. Isn't that one basis of choosing high officials in the British civil service?

*Adam*: Yes, I think Plato is the forerunner of almost all the really important practices today. The point that he's so interested in is how custom and practice—what people really do and have always done—can fit in. And that's why I think he deals with concrete things like marriage and local customs.

*Frankel*: Yes. There's a kind of tension in *The Laws* which is perennial for anyone who at one and the same time wants to be a philosopher—to think ideally about human affairs—and to say something practical that people can actually follow.

*Bryson*: What frightens you, then?

*Frankel*: Before I mention what frightens me, perhaps I should say what *grips* me is this tension and the complete honesty and candor with which Plato makes it explicit. He's going to plan a state—he's going to "engineer" a state, as we say now—but at the same time he is aware that his planning, his engineering, is going to affect people who live a life of habit, of routine, of convention; the great question for Plato is how to get at these conventions and how to recognize them so that he can remake human beings. Now, of course, what frightens me is just that great objective—and the unrelenting, uncompromising way in which Plato goes after it.

*Bryson*: To what extent is all this the result of his disappointment in going to Syracuse and trying to be a practical statesman himself?

*Frankel*: It was written after that great disappointment. There are many scholars who think that it was his experience at Syracuse, his own failure as a practical administrator, that led to *The Laws*. On the other hand, one can also say that it was simply a shift in Plato's emphasis. When he wrote *The Republic* he was a young man; he knew that he was dreaming and he thought that before he got through with life, as it were, he had better stop dreaming and get down to facts.

*Adam*: I think you are very close to the point there, that Plato was trying to get down to facts, but I don't like the idea that Plato found solutions which we don't have today or don't have in better form. It seems to me that the best way to look at these *Laws* is to ask do we have any better answers.

*Bryson*: Let's look at what they were, first. What is there here that has had any influence on us, and how?

*Adam*: Plato's concept of what is a true law is still the most important question. Why do you obey the orders of a superior? Plato said that law was not mere force, not a mere order. He said that law was persuasion; there was only one way in which a man could be persuaded, and that was through reason. A law was knowledge. If it wasn't knowledge, it wasn't a true law. Plato's concept is that human society is organized by reasonable agreement. I don't believe we have

achieved that today, but I don't think it's too impractical to hope for it.

*Frankel*: No, I go along with you there—but I think you credit Plato with too attractive a view. We ought *not* to be persuaded by things that are not reasonable. But Plato, in fact, seems to believe that men frequently ought to be persuaded, if you're being practical, by quite unreasonable techniques. For example, when you start a state, he says, you must pronounce a great myth, a big lie. That's the way to get people going, that's the way to convince them.

*Adam*: I have a horrible feeling that history as we teach it, especially in Britain, is very much the great myth of Plato.

*Frankel*: How else do you persuade people except by education?

*Adam*: You persuade people simply by pure logic. Is not the whole of our training in life the form of persuasion that Plato suggests?

*Frankel*: Oh, yes; but there is, after all, a stage between lying and telling the truth. That is to say, you can appeal to people's feelings without basing that appeal on what you yourself know to be a falsehood.

*Bryson*: If the myth is about your own state, then it's patriotism and not a myth—is that it, Mr. Frankel?

*Frankel*: Well, I won't try to compete with Mr. Adam on how British education works.

*Bryson*: We all know that Mr. Adam uses British education and British politics as a club to trump American politics and American education. . . .

*Frankel*: Well, then he really ought to like *The Laws* because the system of education described here reminds me at many points of the system that's followed in Great Britain. That is to say, at a very early age the young men and the young women should be separated, both should take strenuous part in athletics, they should be brought together under carefully supervised circumstances, and all the rest of it.

*Bryson*: Separated not only from each other but also from their parents?

*Frankel*: Oh, yes.

*Adam*: But the point is that Plato believes education is *for the state*. The British also believed that, to some extent, for at least their middle-class groups. They've educated them not to develop their highest personalities, but to make them useful citizens of a special kind of political community. Now, is there any other real alternative? Can you really educate individuals to be truly free in society, or was Plato right? Is not the second-best the only possible way of organizing society?

*Frankel*: I'm not sure I understand your alternative, Mr. Adam.

*Adam*: Well, my alternative is not to have the political state the center and heart of an educational system, but to have some other idea. What other idea would you have, if not the political state?

*Frankel*: Of course this is not Platonic at all, but one would presume that the political state in the modern world was not the central

educational force; that one would leave that to family, to private educational institutions, to the smaller communities, and the like.

*Bryson:* Can I back up here just a bit? Before we try to answer your very difficult alternative, Mr. Adam, don't we have to take into account what you are taking for granted?—that in Plato's mind these qualities of moderation and honor and dignity and devotion to the good, to divine reason, were part of a morality which was not something detached from the state or the exclusive possession of a church or even of a set of churches, but the state and church and education were all the same institution. It's a concept which we've completely lost. Now, having lost that, how can we go back to the Platonic idea? *Should* we go back to it?

*Adam:* That is the point: Plato thought differently than we are able to think today, because he saw in the small society one totality; men were moral and good in terms of everything. Now we've split our morality into religious morality, social morality, even business morality.

*Bryson:* And political morality.

*Adam:* And political morality! I have a horrible feeling that we are wrong, that there is only one morality. If there's any morality at all, it's a total and single morality; and we've got to get back, somehow or other, to an institution which can be right and not merely relatively right in terms of all the other little institutions running around.

*Bryson:* An absolute is raising its ugly head here, Mr. Frankel. What are we going to do with it?

*Frankel:* Well, I'm not going to knock it down right here. I would say you're quite right, Mr. Adam, that Plato believes, as most Greeks did, that political life is a partnership in the virtues. It is in your activities in the state that you reach the fullest fruition, the fullest realization of your own potentialities. Looking at modern experience, however, I would be inclined to say that when the state takes it upon itself, as Hegel and Rousseau suggested it should do, to train people in morals, to remake the character of its citizens, it almost always—in fact, *always*—ends as a tyranny. Indeed, I think *The Laws* describes what we would now call a tyranny.

*Adam:* I agree with you, Mr. Frankel. I think you made a very strong point there. The political state to us is a matter of force and policemen. To Plato it was a matter of persuasion and reason; therefore, if we have a political state based on the police force, we can never have basically a moral state. We've got to solve our political institutions in terms of persuasion and reason if we're going to have a moral state.

*Frankel:* That suggests, doesn't it, that one mistake is to read Plato too much in modern terms? And another mistake is to imagine that we can solve our problems in the way that he tried to solve them. There are, however, other ideas in *The Laws* which have immensely influenced us. One of them is the notion of moderation. Here Plato emphasizes a virtue which Aristotle later picks up and makes central in western ethics.



*Bryson*: In which the Greeks were conspicuously lacking.

*Frankel*: And always talked about favorably.

*Bryson*: Well, that's customary, too.

*Frankel*: You can usually tell how people behave—that is, how they *don't* behave—by noticing what virtues they emphasize.

*Adam*: While courage and the stoical acceptance of pain, which was the Spartan idea of complete virtue, came in a very poor second.

*Frankel*: The other notion I think we should mention is that of the mixed state. Here, in *The Laws*, Plato suggests that any state which follows just one ideal—for example, the ideal of aristocracy or the ideal of democracy—is bound to end up with injustice. For practical purposes the best ordering of the state is one which mixes the various powers and the various classes, which balances interests against one another. This is an idea that Plato passed on, obviously, to Aristotle. It's the one that interests Aristotle more than any of the ideas in *The Republic*.

*Bryson*: It seems to have shown up again along about the time of Thomas Jefferson.

*Frankel*: Yes, our own American Constitution picks it up from certain French writers, but it goes all the way back to Plato's *Laws*.

*Adam*: At one point Plato considers the ideal of mixed powers solely in terms of being an instrument for the end of the state, and he holds that the end of the state is not democracy or the rule of any group but that the end of the state is justice. We cannot claim to have inherited Plato's ideas of a mixed constitution unless we can claim that the purpose and function of our political state is social justice.

*Bryson*: But, you know, I think we're sort of Platonizing ourselves out of an original difficulty, which Mr. Frankel expressed when he said that this book frightened him. Isn't it true, Mr. Adam, since you seem to be the defender of Plato here for the moment—I don't know how long you would be if I pressed you—isn't it true that one comes upon some rather ugly suggestions that if you *didn't* behave, if you asked questions about the accepted morality, if you raised any real doubts, if you threatened the stability of the state, you got thrown out or put into jail, and if you persisted you got put to death?

*Adam*: I think that's perfectly fair. The point is that Plato did not have the administrative machinery of tyranny that we have today; Plato's state was basically a religious, social, and economic club, and if you did not agree you had to leave.

*Bryson*: There were only 5,040 people in it.

*Adam*: That's right. And you don't need a very big administrative machinery to be tyrannical to 5,040 people. But even today if you do not agree basically with the mores and the manner of life of your community, you have to leave. In a big world like this, of course, you *can* leave. I was able to leave Scotland and come here.

*Bryson*: But when you say "basically" aren't you distinguishing precisely the difference between us and our form of tyranny and Plato and his form, which frightens us because he wanted stability

so much that he didn't want any questions raised at all? We want a *few* questions raised—although we draw the line, of course.

*Adam*: I'm not sure that Plato didn't want any questions raised, but, like many academic men, he wanted the right people to raise them. He didn't want the horrid little students to ask questions he possibly couldn't answer.

*Frankel*: That's quite different, isn't it, from our own way of doing these things? Our problem is to give the professor a chance to say something.

*Bryson*: But what would Plato say about the present state of religion in this country, where absolutely everybody not only has his own religion but publishes it? *He* said only the very greatest intellect should be trusted to make a religious declaration. We say anybody has to find his religion for himself.

*Frankel*: Isn't this one of the first books in political literature which broaches the idea of religious intolerance, which suggests that independent thinking in religion is a political crime?

*Adam*: I think it's the first book in political literature that takes religion and morality really seriously.

*Frankel*: Oh, you think that is taking it seriously?

*Adam*: Yes. I think that unless you took it really seriously you couldn't possibly arrive at Plato's point of view.

*Frankel*: I should have thought that taking religion and morality seriously means following the maxim that the things that are Caesar's shall be Caesar's and the things that are God's shall be God's.

*Bryson*: That maxim came a long time later.

*Frankel*: Yes, but at any rate it suggests that there were two ways of taking these things seriously.

*Bryson*: It does, indeed! And Mr. Adam is also suggesting that one reason why we do *not* enforce religious conformity with our police power—which is more efficient than Plato could have dreamed—is because we don't take morality seriously and we don't take religion seriously. Is that true?

*Adam*: That's true. We don't.

*Bryson*: And so what Plato has failed to do is to bring the high seriousness with which *he* regarded the purposes of life down into our own lives?

*Adam*: I think Plato has succeeded, but in places where we don't look for it. He succeeded in the religious orders. There, I think, you will find Platonic rules followed fully and clearly and the Platonic principles accepted. I don't believe that outside of a fairly small group of very dedicated men or women you can ever have the kind of total society that Plato believed was a really good society. The second-best is beyond our reach, we are at the *third*-best.

*Frankel*: Yes, I think that's right: even when Plato aimed at the second-best, he still wasn't talking practical politics.

*Bryson*: Wouldn't he have said immediately "Of course that's the reason I want this state to be made of only five thousand and forty people"? Naturally, he had some Pythagorean nonsense mixed up in that number.

*Frankel*: It's a lovely number.

*Bryson*: Yes, but I don't think his reason was that always trivial one—that all the people could be reached by the sound of one man's voice; rather, it was that in this very small group you could get real homogeneity.

*Adam*: We suffer from a delusion of masses, and I think Plato is very healthy for us there.

*Bryson*: But how is he healthy if he's talking about something which can only be realized on a lower level and in circumstances which we can't possibly create?

*Adam*: Because we can use our political state for its proper purposes, which are much lower than we pretend. The political state as it exists today can never be a moral institution. Let's use it for collecting garbage—for doing the daily tasks—and not clutter it up with ideas of morality and idealism which the political state of today simply cannot carry.

*Frankel*: Well, that's quite extraordinary! Mr. Adam apparently is using Plato to support his advice not to follow Plato.

*Bryson*: Because we have added another ideal, which is that people should educate themselves by participation, have we spoiled the chance of achieving Plato's monastic single-minded state?

*Adam*: I think that is true. I think that our whole educational system, our whole cultural system, has offered opportunity for men to get together in social groups to pursue high ends outside the total political mass. I think this is the essence of modern liberal thinking.

*Bryson*: Yes, but now wait a minute! There's an oblique implication here. What about the fact that we think every man should be urged and even, if possible, compelled to take part in the actual business of the state? Is that futile, considering the size of our government?

*Adam*: Well, I think it's unnecessary.

*Bryson*: Not useful?

*Adam*: Not useful in terms of moral development. It's useful in terms of practical management.

*Frankel*: I think it's useful, if I may break in, in terms of self-defense. I think it does help people to realize their potentialities; but I think the best reason why we should expect and hope that we have a society in which people participate actively in the political arrangements is that they can then defend themselves better, keep themselves from being oppressed or exploited.

*Bryson*: I think I would attribute it to a higher motive, or perhaps not a higher motive but a more profound one: that is, that we think public business is the most educative experience that any human being can have. Therefore, all citizens should have it to carry out the other purpose of Plato, which is to make the state an educative agent.

*Adam*: Thank you, Mr. Bryson—but I just don't believe it.

*Bryson*: You don't believe it works?

*Adam*: I don't believe it works! But I think it's a very good and sound notion.

*Bryson:* Why doesn't it work?

*Adam:* Because I think that man has limited time and limited energies and there are far more exciting things for him to do to develop both his personal intelligence and his moral values.

*Bryson:* You say limited time, not limited minds?

*Adam:* Well, it might be. If man's a scientist there's no reason why he should spend his time fooling around with public business.

*Frankel:* And a great many of the things that Plato actually thought were state business we now regard as private business.

*Bryson:* Including religion.

*Frankel:* Yes. But I think, in a sense, that we've been taking the wrong tack. When I read *The Laws*, although I find a good deal of it oppressive, I find also, as I do whenever I read Plato, with whom I disagree, something marvelously liberating.

*Bryson:* Now why? If one could explain that, wouldn't you then be able to explain why for nearly twenty-five hundred years he's been the one author everybody had to read?

*Frankel:* I can't in thirty seconds or so explain the magic of Plato, but in a sense Plato never touches any human activity in which he doesn't see man against the stars, in which he doesn't see man as acting against the backdrop of eternity and committed to something of really ultimate importance. What is the best that men can make of their lives? And unless we answer that question, and look at it carefully, we can't really look at politics or religion or education or any of these things. He asks us to make an ultimate commitment and it's marvelously liberating.

*Adam:* The only thing I can say to that is Amen!

*Bryson:* But how modern he is when he starts out by looking at human beings as little wild animals! He's almost Freudian in saying that the child is a little monster that must somehow be restrained and trained.

*Frankel:* If you are going to see man against the stars, one side of him is going to look awfully small and awfully puny. You're going to have a low view and a high view at one and the same time.

*Adam:* One more thing: he's not afraid to use the weapon of conditioning. He believes that man has a moral purpose and is, as you say, very magnificently against the stars. Therefore he's not afraid of bending the green twig, he's not afraid of using education for a social purpose.

*Bryson:* And you think that he actually was using education and persuasion more than he was using what sounds like a threat of just plain police force?

*Adam:* Much more!

*Bryson:* Because I think we do tend in our modern circumstances to misunderstand him.

*Frankel:* Social pressure is even more than a great agency of social coercion; if we did live in Plato's state, there is no question but that the common, ordinary belief would be that men ought to think the same. In fact, Plato says that: they ought to be of the same heart and of the same mind. To live in such a society, it seems to me, would

be stifling. I think most people who regard themselves as civilized today feel that "the other fellow has his own tastes, his own likes and dislikes; as long as he doesn't push his preferences off on me, live and let live."

*Adam:* You wouldn't make a good army man, Mr. Frankel.

*Frankel:* No!

*Adam:* Not even a good member of a religious order.

*Frankel:* Well, one puts up with those things but they're not models of civilization. I don't mean religious orders—they're different from the army.

*Bryson:* But a much more searching question would be as to whether or not Mr. Frankel could be a good scientist, because scientists—who are, after all, very close to the priests of our modern civilization—disagree among themselves as to how much democratic freedom contributes to science and how much regimentation would contribute. You find two quite different points of view there. Some people would say we couldn't have our achievements in the mastery of the material world without discipline and organization; others say that's just the way to stop it.

*Frankel:* I think it may be a false alternative, you know, to set up discipline against freedom. Freedom is one form of discipline.

*Adam:* As a member of a university faculty, I am searching my conscience and I am going to remain mute.

*Bryson:* Go ahead and search your conscience, Mr. Adam! Perhaps you can find out why it is that Plato, whom we credit with providing so much of the moral basis of modern thinking, does not in *The Laws* express the germ of the idea that came later, more explicitly, with the Stoics: that is, that all human beings are brothers and all should have a chance at the divine life.

## FEODOR DOSTOEVSKY

### *Notes from Underground*

(As broadcast May 20, 1956)

ANNE FREMANTLE • ERNEST J. SIMMONS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* My own response to the major novels of Dostoevsky has always been that I can't tear myself away. In a curious way, this particular story doesn't keep me so absorbed. It's painful to read and it's hard work, but am I wrong in thinking it has a central position in Dostoevsky?

*Simmons:* *Notes from Underground* was written, really, at the

midpoint of Dostoevsky's career; the great novels were to follow. And if you consider the five that were to come as the five acts of a classical tragedy, then one can very easily consider this book as a kind of prologue in the sense that it does involve itself in practically all the major themes of those later novels.

*Fremantle*: Don't you find the circumstances in which he wrote this novel very interesting? It was written by his dying wife's bedside. She was dying of tuberculosis and almost mad; he had to write between trying to mend the clocks, which she wound up till their springs broke. . . .

*Bryson*: Part of her mania?

*Fremantle*: Yes, and she'd curse him for not being able to fix them. He said himself that everything that had gone before was only a rehearsal for the ghastly condition he found himself in—the fortress, the imprisonment, the exile in Siberia, everything he'd suffered was paradise compared to his present hell.

*Simmons*: There's something a bit unfeeling about him, though, don't you think? He wrote to his brother at this particular point and said that if his wife didn't die in the meantime, he'd probably be able to finish the book.

*Bryson*: In spite of the fact that it was something worse than he'd been through before, in spite of the fact that the title is sometimes very curiously translated, this is not about Dostoevsky's own miserable experiences. This is about a curious character, a typically Dostoevskian character—a kind of bin of traits out of which he constructed the other characters of the great novels.

*Simmons*: Pretty much so. As a matter of fact, I think he is one of the more peculiarly difficult characters of Dostoevsky to understand.

*Bryson*: He's most unpleasant.

*Simmons*: Very unpleasant, and very difficult to comprehend in this extraordinary psychologizing and self-analysis he indulges in. You know we often say that it would be very difficult to recognize a Dostoevsky character if we met him on the street. An Englishman once gave *Crime and Punishment* to one of his friends to read, and the friend returned it with the remark: "Well, you know, if these people had only gone to an English public school they never would have this difficulty."

*Bryson*: I know a very clever woman who says that the reason we have trouble with the Russians now is because, when we used to be so enthusiastic about their novels, we never realized that there really were people like that in the world.

*Fremantle*: I think the reason we don't recognize Dostoevsky's characters is because we don't recognize ourselves coming down the street; one person you would never recognize, if you met him walking in the street, is yourself.

*Bryson*: That is, I'm sure, a sound remark, but it requires an awful lot of explanation—because I can't see in you any of the horrible traits of the man who writes this book.

*Fremantle*: But don't you think that's the point? You can't

recognize me in it and I can't recognize you, but we each of us can recognize ourselves. It's an analysis of one's self, not of someone else.

*Bryson*: But doesn't one have to say "There but for the grace of God go I"?

*Fremantle*: Yes, that's exactly where each one of us would be but for the grace of God.

*Simmons*: You really feel, Mrs. Fremantle, that you can identify yourself with some of the peculiar problems that the underground man displays in this diary?

*Bryson*: Just a minute—this might be much easier to talk about if we follow the way the story develops.

*Simmons*: Yes, Dostoevsky divides this story into two parts. There is the first part, *Underground*, in which the underground man analyzes himself fully and completely. . . .

*Bryson*: Isn't it important to make clear that the "underground man" is not a criminal?

*Simmons*: By "underground" he doesn't mean the revolutionary underground of Russia's lengthy upheavals.

*Bryson*: Nor the underworld, as we put it?

*Simmons*: It doesn't mean the underworld. What it simply means is that you have a man here who is supremely introspective and falls back upon the noisome chaos of his own imagination. This is the underground for him.

*Fremantle*: He describes himself as a mouse who's been despised and rejected and humiliated and who goes underground and sits there for forty years. He sits there mulling over his misfortunes. But a mouse isn't a noisome creature, it's not even an insect; it's a rather nice character, fundamentally.

*Simmons*: Mrs. Fremantle, you're the first woman I've ever known who's uttered a word of praise for a mouse!

*Bryson*: After all, Mickey has done something to our attitudes towards mice. I think a mouse is a character to which this man could scarcely aspire, it's so much above him.

*Simmons*: Well, I think that's being a bit harsh on him.

*Bryson*: I *am* harsh on this person, and I want to know what makes him the way he is.

*Simmons*: Let's try to get down to it. We've mentioned that the first part is concerned with the inner thoughts, the imaginings, the hopes, the aspirations, the defeats, the cataclysms, and the life of the underground man. The second part is concerned with a series of incidents in his life, portrayed against the background of the analysis of the first part. Now, I would think that a number of those incidents, as they are described, elevate this man above the height of a mouse.

*Bryson*: Even a nice mouse? But what is it that he's trying to show has happened to him as a result of this long series of not too uncommon deprivations? I mean being an orphan, being poverty-stricken, being completely unsuccessful in his bureaucratic career.

*Fremantle*: I think he resents that everything good has been taken away from him, that he's been given nothing of good at all, and that man is created to be happy and good.

*Bryson*: Dostoevsky believes that the will tends toward good?

*Fremantle*: Yes, and the freedom of the will is the thing that Dostoevsky, in all his books, is discussing anyway.

*Simmons*: I'm afraid I wouldn't agree. I don't think Dostoevsky feels, necessarily, that the expression of the will leads to good. As a matter of fact, the underground man attempts to express his will, and does it lead him to anything particularly good?

*Bryson*: This is a very old philosophic problem, as you know better than I. Did Dostoevsky—this seems to me a clear point—follow the Socratic idea that man wants the good and if he fails to get it, it's because he's made a mistake?

*Simmons*: As with so many of the preceding characters in Dostoevsky, and with a great many of the very famous characters that were to follow, I think the essential difficulty of the underground man is that he simply cannot make up his own mind. In short, he is a victim of what is called in modern psychological parlance extreme ambivalence; he really is a split personality.

*Fremantle*: I think Dostoevsky is saying all the time that man *isn't* just a victim. Here is this creature who is being spat upon; his companions are rude to him, he's rude back, and he takes it out on the poor girl he picks up. But the point is that even the man to whom things happen yet has the freedom to choose. Dostoevsky is saying not that man will always choose the good, but that he has the *freedom* to choose it.

*Simmons*: Oh, in this I would agree with you. It was certainly a cardinal point in all of Dostoevsky's thinking that man should be given the right, always, to choose between good and evil.

*Fremantle*: Not *should* be given it—*has* it, surely!

*Bryson*: Can't escape it.

*Fremantle*: That's it, Mr. Bryson. If you try to remove man's freedom, you can reduce the objects of his choice but you can't take away that freedom itself.

*Simmons*: But you see that the underground man, in attempting to manifest or to exercise his freedom of choice, gets into incredible difficulties all the way through this story. He feels that he must insult this character he meets on the Nevsky Prospekt when he goes out walking. . . .

*Bryson*: Somebody he doesn't even know.

*Simmons*: No. But in his ambivalent state of mind, where the desire to be supreme is combined with the desire to be meek and humble, the desire for power with the necessity of having no power, he just feels that somehow or other he must manifest his power and slap this man in the face if necessary.

*Bryson*: To go back to his childhood as he recounts it in the first part of *Notes from Underground*, he has a friend in school, you remember . . .

*Simmons*: Simonov. Although he was the only person in the school who offered him any kind of friendship, he feels that he somehow or other must debase him.

*Fremantle*: And in the second part of the book, *Apr6pos of the Wet Snow*, doesn't Dostoevsky suggest that his childhood relation-



ship with Simonov is repeated in his relationship with Liza? As soon as he believes that Liza loves him and that he's on top of the situation, he has to insult her and hurt her—so that you have a repetition of the pattern, but with the same free choice offered again.

*Simmons*: The free choice is offered. But what happens in that extraordinary finale of the book? You remember that having gone to this house of ill fame in order to slap the face of the officer Zverkov . . .

*Bryson*: Let's keep to the story. This book is so difficult to get, I think, that we must put Dostoevsky's philosophic conclusions into the events. He's a dramatist in that sense, profoundly so.

*Simmons*: You remember that he goes to work in the government service after he gets through school; he tries to keep up with a few of his school friends although he dislikes them intensely, he feels that they're all beneath him, that they haven't anything of his intellectual ability.

*Bryson*: And of course his intellectual ability gives him no professional success.

*Simmons*: None whatsoever. They decide to have a farewell party for one of their common friends, an officer, whom the underground man detests cordially, and he forces himself upon that party even though they do not want to have him. He proceeds to insult them, they insult him, and then there takes place that simply excruciating scene—one of the most excruciating, I think, in all of Dostoevsky's writing—in which the underground man paces up and down for hours at a stretch while these so-called boon companions of his school days enjoy themselves.

*Fremantle*: He behaves atrociously.

*Bryson*: And suffers atrociously, too.

*Fremantle*: Yes, and suffers atrociously. But don't you think that is the exciting part? Because it shows that he is *choosing* evil; he's behaving appallingly and he knows it. After all, the book begins: "I am a sick man . . . I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man." And though he knows he's disgusting, yet that choice of evil, that choice of the bad, is still an expression of the freedom of the will.

*Simmons*: Yes, he has a freedom of choice. But what is the resolution of this freedom that he has? You recall that he pursues the officer Zverkov to a house of ill fame with the desire to slap him in the face, humiliate him; he misses him there and spends the night with one of the young ladies. Now, you remember what happens in that scene.

*Fremantle*: Yes, he humiliates her and he gives her the worst soft-soap talk, a moral talk, that anybody ever gave in that situation.

*Simmons*: But why does he do that?

*Fremantle*: In order to torture her. It's a beautiful example of one-upmanship.

*Simmons*: That's right. After he delivers this sermon of reformation to her and feels infinitely superior to her—he has recovered from his humiliation and insults of the night before at the party—he even invites her to come to his home.

*Bryson*: One of the most ironic strokes in the book is that the sermon, just taken as a sermon by itself, is pretty good. It's charlatanism, it's complete insincerity, it's a desire to hurt the girl by telling her she ought to be ashamed of herself. Nevertheless, it's a pretty good sermon—but in this situation it's wholly abominable.

*Simmons*: I would want to insist that the underground man at this point is deeply sincere. He feels a certain impulse to love—one of the more honest sensations that he's had in his career—and that is why he does invite the young lady to come and see him.

*Fremantle*: But that ambivalence—the moral value of the sermon itself and the horror of the situation in which it's given—is almost as though Dostoevsky were being prophetic about certain facts of life in all nations. For instance, we are the country with the highest standard of living in the world and the lowest illiteracy rate, but we have the highest suicide rate and the highest juvenile delinquency rate. These things do go together.

*Bryson*: You mean that ambivalence is a characteristic of highly sophisticated nations as well as of persons?

*Fremantle*: Well, the greater the good, the higher the ratio of evil. That ambivalence is part of the human situation.

*Bryson*: And if you raise the level you simply widen the ambivalence? That's a pretty important statement which you are making.

*Fremantle*: Well, I'm not making it as a statement, I'm asking it as a question. I think that Dostoevsky was asking it as a question.

*Simmons*: I sort of like your pulling that out of your sleeve. I would give it an even more direct sense of modernity. In this story I think we have, essentially, a struggle between reason and free will, as has already been advanced in our discussion. In that sense I think the materialism that is abroad in the world today is precisely the kind of thing that Dostoevsky was combatting in this story and, as a matter of fact, was to struggle against for the rest of his life. You remember that the underground man says he is against reason, he's against the rational; he says he is tired of adding two and two and making four, he'd like to get to the point where two and two really make five. That would be excitement, that would be something new, innovating. In short, of course, that would be irrational, wouldn't it? This struggle between the rational and non-rational was what troubled Dostoevsky all his life.

*Bryson*: In himself?

*Simmons*: Very much so.

*Bryson*: He wanted to add two and two and make seven?

*Simmons*: At least make six, I would say. I think that in many respects the underground man is a projection of the very dualism that existed in Dostoevsky himself.

*Fremantle*: But one must qualify that by saying that it wasn't because he was ever a romantic—there was never a greater realist than Dostoevsky—and he says himself: "We Russians have never gone in for that stupid, transcendental romanticizing." It seems to me his position is nearer that of Goethe in a letter to Hegel—much earlier, of course—in which he says that there's a gap between the idea

man holds of reality and the experience he has of it; in order to bridge that gap we use reason, understanding, faith, feeling, and illusion—and if everything else fails, we use nonsense.

*Bryson*: Does Dostoevsky then say that in man's effort to bridge the gap he must always fail, and that this is one of the examples of his failure?

*Fremantle*: I think Dostoevsky says a man must fail without help from the outside.

*Bryson*: Because the ambivalence in him is irremediable?

*Fremantle*: No, not because it's irremediable but because he needs outside help.

*Bryson*: That is, it cannot be remedied from within. Then he is a transcendentalist after all, isn't he?

*Simmons*: I wouldn't know. I would agree that he's one of the most rational romantics that I've ever met in the whole range of literature. He warred against reason and, nevertheless, approached reason as a very rational person. But there is a mystique in Dostoevsky. He felt that man cannot live by reason alone and one of the things that appalled him, I think, was the wave of materialism from the west that was already beginning to sweep over Russia. This is manifested in the underground man in several ways. Just before writing this book Dostoevsky had taken a trip to the west, you recall, and he wrote up that trip in an article which he published in his own magazine. The burden of a good deal of the article is simply to rail against the materialism of the west which he found extremely uncongenial to his Russian soul.

*Bryson*: What did he mean by "materialism," Mr. Simmons? That word is used with such a wide catalogue of meaning; what did he mean by it?

*Simmons*: His meaning in this sense, I think, was socialism; he felt that the ills of the world were not to be cured by socialism, by rational application of remedies.

*Bryson*: That is, science applied to man in order to cure his material ills and give him comfort and security and so on, would not save his soul?

*Simmons*: Would not save his soul. The answer Dostoevsky does not explicitly give in this book—and I may say there's some reason to suppose that the answer was excluded by the censor—is that man must have faith. The underground man had no faith. It's very interesting to observe that it is this sense of faith, this feeling of love which Liza has, that saves her, whereas it's the absence of this faith which condemns the underground man.

*Fremantle*: Would you agree that there are three steps in the analysis Dostoevsky makes of the human condition? The first stage is resentment against other people: a man is hurt, therefore he must hurt back. We get that all through history. When a nation or people is wounded, they fight back.

*Bryson*: The hero of this book does that, of course, at one point.

*Fremantle*: And it gets him nowhere. The second stage is that in which the man recognizes his own evil and fights it in himself and

punishes himself. There you have all the self-torturers and self-punishers in the five great Dostoevsky novels. And, finally, you have the resolution which is hinted at with Liza, and accomplished in Alyosha of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

*Simmons*: Even with the underground man there is an effort made to preach the doctrine which later was to become so important for Dostoevsky—that is, the necessity of achieving salvation by suffering. But it is my opinion that the underground man himself, though he recognizes the relevance of this doctrine, is really incapable of the kind of suffering that an Alyosha, let us say, or a Dimitri Karamazov was capable of.

*Fremantle*: Yes, but so was Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*. Each person suffers as much as he is capable of suffering, and the underground man can only suffer his own resentment.

*Bryson*: Is that his failure, Mrs. Fremantle?

*Fremantle*: That is his failure, of course, just as Raskolnikov's failure is that he can only suffer for his own sins.

*Simmons*: That is, he's a completely self-centered, analyzing, hopeless individual concerned largely with the miseries of his own soul and he has no feeling or apprehension of the world outside him. He is the supreme example, I think, in Dostoevsky's terms of the rational man who has not learned either to suffer himself or to assume the guilt and sufferings of others.

*Fremantle*: The supreme example of the misuse of the freedom of the will, whereas Liza, it seems to me, is already an expression—more even than an expression—of suffering willingly undertaken by love. She loves the underground man for one moment and she accepts the suffering he inflicts upon her. She isn't yet ready to take suffering voluntarily, but she accepts the suffering he inflicts because she loves. Alyosha goes out to *seek* suffering—that's one step further.

*Bryson*: Both of you have used the word "faith." But faith in what?

*Simmons*: Well, of course, in Dostoevsky's terms it means faith in the Church, in the Russian Orthodox Church. That was his implicit faith. He felt that the believing person was the person who could be saved, because this person would understand the sufferings of the world, the sufferings of others, and would be willing to suffer for others.

*Fremantle*: Isn't faith nearly the supreme example of free choice? "I *choose* to accept suffering, I *choose* to believe in the possibility of redemption."

*Simmons*: Oh, very much so. Dostoevsky—I agree with you thoroughly—feels that the individual must have freedom to choose his faith. And that is, I think, what makes Liza the great character in this book. She has love, which in Dostoevsky's terms could be faith.

*Bryson*: So Dostoevsky is really preaching a great truth which is at the root of all religions: lose yourself and thereby gain your salvation.

# HENRY JAMES

## *The American Scene*

(As broadcast May 27, 1956)

LEON EDEL

• ALFRED KAZIN

• LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* In his later manner, which has been much criticized for being too obscure and too subtle, Henry James came over to take a look at America. He said he wasn't writing a travel book, and yet *The American Scene* is a book about his travels.

*Edel:* It's the old Henry James surveying the land of the young Henry James.

*Bryson:* After how long?

*Edel:* Twenty-one years. It's a kind of Rip Van Winkle story. He hadn't set foot in America for twenty-one years.

*Bryson:* And I suppose a good deal of what seems to us too "British" in the book merely reflects the unconscious change that had come over the man. Did he still love America?

*Edel:* No man could write a book of this sort without loving America.

*Bryson:* Do you mean that nobody could criticize in quite this way anything he didn't love?

*Edel:* Yes. I think that's reflected on every page and in every phrase.

*Bryson:* If it isn't a travel book, what is it? You say it's the older Henry James looking at the America of the younger Henry James, but just an ordinary travel book might be that.

*Kazin:* Well, there's no travel book quite like it, because the travel occurs, as it were, entirely in James's own mind. James is writing here a book which seems to me to be utterly remarkable, a book which depends on the power of language to evoke scenes, the past, houses, buildings and memories of tradition which exist, as it were, only as phases in the man's mind. The book is woven together out of impressions.

*Bryson:* And memories! But the world that he loved and left, the world of Albany and Newport and old New York *had* existed. You don't mean to say that this is fantasy?

*Kazin:* I mean that James is not trying to report on how many miles he has traveled nor is he writing a book which depends on some exterior plot and narrative. He is writing a book which depends primarily upon the energy and the color of the writer's own mind; and in that sense, because he trusts to his impressions and not just to the external significance of what he's writing about, it seems to me to be a work which in many ways is, well, uncharacteristic of our literature. It's above the genres: it's not fiction, it's not travel, it's written in great prose, a prose which has the mobility and the elo-

quence of poetry but is not a prose poem. It's a book which is frankly and joyfully subjective. What James says is: "I will dawdle on every pavement and look and see and report on what I think."

*Edel:* And paint! He's painting pictures on every page.

*Bryson:* And yet these pictures have a curiously subjective quality.

*Edel:* Oh, yes. The only way to look at these pictures is to quote them, really.

*Bryson:* With the warning that James's prose is a little difficult.

*Edel:* Well, let's see. Here, for instance, is the glimpse he got of the New York skyline in 1904. Of course it wasn't the skyline that we see today.

*Bryson:* It was just a mere wrinkle compared to the skyline of today.

*Edel:* Yes, but it looked big to him. Here is the way he described it:

*... The multitudinous skyscrapers standing up to the view, from the water, like extravagant pins in a cushion already overplanted, and stuck in as in the dark, anywhere and anyhow . . . they are impudently new and still more impudently "novel" . . . all of which uncontested and unabashed pride, with flash of innumerable windows and flicker of subordinate gilt attributions, is like the flare, up and down their long, narrow faces, of the lamps of some general permanent "celebration."*

That's sheer poetry.

*Kazin:* It's poetry which is poetic not because of the splendor of the language, though it couldn't be more splendid, but because James believed there is a kind of secret in any place. The object of the writer, as he sees it, is to wrest that secret out of the inanimate—and this, I think, is remarkable. A man stands in front of a building and says to himself: "That building has organic meaning. It has a secret, has a personality. I want to express this." Now is that meaning entirely subjective? Of course it isn't! It's wholly artistic. I want to emphasize that as sharply as I can, because I do have some criticism of the book. I think it's remarkable because James frankly and joyfully trusts to his impressions, not because they are subjective, but because *he* is. That is, he feels that in some way he can wrest the meaning from things without becoming a sociologist or an historian.

*Bryson:* Well, of course, he was a novelist, even though here he's using none of the ordinary apparatus of the novel.

*Kazin:* He has no story.

*Bryson:* He has no story, he has no characters. He's only writing the background of a novel that never existed. What is it that he sees? What are these spiritual qualities? He sees something more than skyscrapers that look in the distance like pins in a cushion.

*Edel:* He's terribly worried about the way in which the old New York that he knew, that New York mostly below Fourteenth Street, has disappeared.

*Bryson*: And it was the aristocracy and wealth of the old New York that he knew, too, wasn't it? At least it was the elegance and the manners of the old New York. He wasn't worried much about the lower East Side.

*Edel*: No, there wasn't much of an East Side. You see, he lived in New York before the great wave of immigration began.

*Bryson*: But not before slums, Mr. Edel. There was plenty of poverty and misery in New York in the nineteenth century.

*Edel*: We have the picture of his society in *Washington Square*, one of his novels. We have other stories of his which tell of the life that went on behind the facades of the brownstones. This is the New York he knew intimately and it had certain standards, a certain culture, certain decencies, and observed a certain way of life—all of which was being pulled down.

*Bryson*: All gone!

*Edel*: All gone, and not only physically. There was no continuity of that society, either.

*Bryson*: Because of the immigration?

*Edel*: Above all our materialism, because he felt that there was no real cultural goal in the "money madness" he saw.

*Bryson*: But he also objected to these "hordes" of Europeans coming over, who didn't have much grasp of an elegant culture of their own and who had absolutely no capacity in his opinion for any elegances here.

*Edel*: I don't think he *objected*. I think he wondered whether the melting pot would work.

*Bryson*: Well, "object"—I was trying to go too fast. He didn't *object*, but he was disturbed.

*Edel*: He was certainly disturbed, yes.

*Kazin*: He's disturbed, of course, by the lack of continuity. To him these immigrants are simply new men. They're pretenders; they have no business being there. But, you know, I said before that James's talent was very impressionistic and very poetic, and I think of his mind as having a kind of Miltonic grandeur. His images are important, but I must say immediately that in this case a very bizarre, remarkable kind of talent met a very passionate subject. That is, what James is taking on—head on—in this book is the new reign of wealth. After all, there are few periods in the world in which a force becomes absolutely decisive. From the Civil War to the end, let's say, of the first World War something new was happening to American life. Everyone was shaken by it. It's the era of the trust, the era of the big cities, and the rest. Now James with his, as it were, purely personal talent—a David armed with nothing but words—takes on this Goliath. It is what makes the book so remarkable.

*Bryson*: And this had happened since he went to Europe twenty-one years before.

*Kazin*: Exactly. This is the beginning of our world. And anyone who reads this book can recognize it as fundamentally the same New York in which we live right now.

*Bryson*: But he objected to the fact that the continuity was gone?

*Edel*: There's a sentence here which sums it up, when he speaks of the skyscrapers as "simply the most piercing note in that concert of the expensively provisional into which your supreme sense of New York resolves itself." The "expensively provisional." He felt that there was tremendous waste here—just producing wealth for the sake of wealth, without putting it to work for culture and civilization and manners.

*Bryson*: Of course, he couldn't have anticipated subsequent economic theories that you can only reach a certain level of wealth if you waste it fast enough—theories that are a kind of rationalization of what disturbed him so much.

*Kazin*: I think that James's shrewdness should be emphasized here, for the book is not merely impressionistic in the literary sense of the word. James in his shrewdness saw that all this wealth was looking for an occasion on which to spend itself. It was looking for a function. What had really influenced him in Europe and in England, as it always influences the American who goes abroad and lives there too long, is the myth that Europe has a function because it has a tradition, whereas America, being a new country, is without any *raison d'être*. A reason for being is what James kept looking for. He sees all these new villas, as he calls them, in Newport and in Saratoga and most of all on the Jersey shore, and he says to himself: "What's it all for?" Then, of course, there's his typical crack after going to a party and seeing the ladies of America wearing tiaras: "In this country the tiara produces the occasion; in London the occasion produces the tiara."

*Edel*: Well, James is certainly worried about that, but I think what he's concerned with even more is that the old America, which he knew, had faded away completely.

*Bryson*: I think his indictment of the world of 1904, which Mr. Kazin has just been summing up, could be questioned on other grounds, too. That is, not on the grounds that the emphasis is wrong; but I would very seriously question that the wealth used in Europe in ways that he seems to have accepted was any better used than the wealth of America. The maintenance of a great social tradition may be a very beautiful poetic creation, but it's not very useful in the workaday world.

*Kazin*: Every writer, every American writer, is at heart a European in one sense: every intellectual loves tradition and when he goes to Europe he thinks he finds it there. It's not really there any more. The fact is that Europe today, as we all know, is becoming more and more Americanized. If James were in Europe today, he'd flee to—well, where? There's no longer any place.

*Edel*: I think that Henry James's feeling ran more deeply than that. You see, it wasn't only a question of the Europeans and how they used their wealth—it was the fact that in Europe, as a result of this continuity of tradition, the men took part in the social fabric.

*Bryson*: Not only women?

*Edel*: That's the point! In other words, what he finds in America is that men are busy in "downtown," as he puts it, whereas "uptown"



is entirely a woman's world. The whole custody of culture and civilization has been placed in the hands of women and he sees an ever-increasing feminization of American life. This bothers him deeply.

*Bryson*: Although I think you are interpreting James correctly, that seems to me a bit paradoxical. We ordinarily think of women in most cultures as the conservative and conserving sex, but here he's saying that because men have ceased to conserve culture in America it is going to be discontinuous. What's the matter with the American woman?

*Edel*: Well, what he's really saying is that the American woman has been given a kind of queenly role and that she suffers from an acute case of "queenship."

*Kazin*: She's been given a queenly role in a family which is not royal and in which the king is too busy piling up money.

*Edel*: That's right.

*Kazin*: Too busy to think of himself as a king—more as a hard-pressed servant in the ranks. What James is getting at all the time is the lack of a fundamental reason, a fundamental occasion, in American life.

*Bryson*: Which he imagines as existing in Europe?

*Kazin*: Yes, which he imagines. Now we have admitted that this is not true of Europe, but it certainly is not true of America, either. James's insight is profound. What he saw is what we see ourselves, all around us. In the last few years part of the excitement of being an American has come from realization that everyone in America is trying to do something with the new money that has come in, trying, as it were, through our anxious sense of our own culture, to show that we have a purpose in the world. This, I think, has always been the American picture, and what James saw very acutely was that in Europe there was a feeling of defeat because present conditions will not sustain the old myth. In America the myth is always being recreated.

*Bryson*: On another level, there's a great deal of just straight city planning in this book, of architectural insight and architectural explanation. I would say all of that really is prophetic, because a great many of the things he said we ought to do he would now find done if he came back to New York.

*Edel*: He said New Yorkers had no imagination of the future and were blind before the opportunity given to them by their two magnificent waterfronts. He deplores the way in which New York streets run up and down and across, instead of opening up into wide squares and using the landscape of the two rivers.

*Bryson*: This is where I think James was completely wrong. The one thing that New York *has* gained in the last fifty years is a sense of the future.

*Kazin*: Yes, but James's city was not the one we see today. What would he have said about the New York of today, in which every decent-looking structure on Fifth Avenue is being torn down to make way for still another office building?

*Edel*: But he *has* said it: "The city is, of all great cities, the least endowed with any blessed item of stately square or goodly

garden, with any happy accident of surprise, any fortunate nook or casual corner, any deviation, in fine, into the liberal or the charming."

*Bryson*: I think that may be true, but let me defend modern New York. After all, this world that has come about has really followed some of his advice and invented a few things he hadn't thought about. I think it would be absurd now to say that either of the great clusters of skyscrapers in New York, downtown or midtown, is merely pins in a pincushion.

*Kazin*: They are cannons in a cannon-cushion . . .

*Bryson*: They may not be friendly, they may not give you little corners to feel cosy in, but no one can say that they are not beautiful.

*Kazin*: Exactly. And they are beautiful because New York really is the greatest city man has ever created. It is the city of cities. There's no doubt about that in my mind, and I think that James would have seen in this tremendous expression of wealth, of power, and of opulence exactly the kind of material his mind delighted in. You remember that when Marshal von Blücher saw London he is supposed to have said "*Was für Plunder!*"—"What a city to sack!" And think of what James would have said, standing on top of the Empire State Building and looking around him: "What a city to describe!" There is no doubt that the city becomes more and more impersonal but also more brilliant. I think in this sense that James would have realized the esthetic function of it.

*Bryson*: But he wouldn't have been happy about the esthetic function because the moral function wouldn't have suited him.

*Kazin*: Yes, but this is an utterly original book. There's no other book in the world like it. James not only talks about buildings, but has buildings talking to themselves and to each other.

*Bryson*: And back to him!

*Kazin*: One of the great functions that literature performs is to make the world seem alive. A great poet always makes life seem more alive than it was before. Well, James can make a city come alive.

*Edel*: James was doing exactly the same thing that Proust was doing. He was saying "I'm an artist and it's my function to bring these buildings alive. There they stand! They're just bricks and stone and steel. It's my words that will make them live. I will paint the picture, I will give them permanence."

*Kazin*: And what pictures! He compares, for example, the famous houses of Baltimore with their white steps to sedate old ladies sitting on footstools. He compares Central Park to an actress taking the air. He speaks of Carpenters Hall, in Philadelphia, as something which reminds him of old England. He speaks of the air of hard prosperity, the "ruthlessly pushed-up and promoted" look worn by men, women and children alike. But, above all, when he goes to Newport, which he had loved so much as a young man, nostalgia creates a prose utterly unlike anything else. May I just read this wonderful passage where he suddenly remembers the old Newport?

*. . . They danced and they drove and they rode, they dined and wine and dressed and flirted and yachted and poloed*

*and casinoed, responding to the subtlest inventions of their age. On the old lawns and verandas I saw them gather, on the old shining sands I saw them gallop, past the low headlands I saw their white sails verily flash, and through the dusty old shrubberies came the light and sound of their feasts.*

*Edel:* That's very beautiful.

*Bryson:* Yes, it is; of course, it's nostalgia for a world which James knew was gone and for which we now don't have any use.

*Kazin:* Yes.

*Bryson:* Are we wrong?

*Kazin:* James understood one great function of the artist which writers today have forgotten: that reality itself is fabulous. To a good writer anything in the American scene is wonderful, and what too many writers lack today is sympathy for objects. Their trade is not always with them, as James's always *was*.

*Edel:* But as James looked at these buildings or on these old scenes, and saw man crawling deeper and deeper into the earth and higher and higher into the sky, what bothered him was that there were no spiritual roots there, there was no sense of the past, no continuity . . .

*Bryson:* Couldn't they have been there without his seeing them?

*Edel:* That may be. *He* couldn't see them.

*Kazin:* Exactly.

*Bryson:* I share your admiration for this book as a great piece of prose, Mr. Kazin, but my question to Mr. Edel is based upon a feeling that perhaps Henry James was not the man who *could* have seen the America of today, which was just being born then. You say that if he came back now he would say: "What a city to describe!" But I wonder if he *could* have seen it.

*Kazin:* I think your question is very timely. You see, I spoke of objects. James's mind has more sympathy for buildings and for streets than it has for classes of people who don't have his sympathy. When he goes down south, for example, he still sees the Negroes only as servants.

*Bryson:* They were not good for servants any more.

*Kazin:* When he sees Jewish immigrants on the lower East Side, he can see them only in terms of clichés. There is a lack of artistic sympathy because his mind, as it were, is formalized on certain levels. He is wonderful on the most unexpected objects, but if an ordinary person came along as it did in Salem—a little boy, for example—his sympathy rejects him immediately.

*Edel:* I come back to your use of the word Miltonic. There's something classical about his whole view. He's a classicist.

*Kazin:* A lover of form.

*Bryson:* And very definitely the artist whose interest in manners transcends everything else. I mean that in the largest sense.

*Kazin:* That is, of course, James the novelist, the professional novelist who wrote about manners.

*Bryson*: In this book he's creating background for a novel that he never wrote. Is there anything in James anywhere to indicate that this extraordinary, this miraculous sensibility could have seen the America of today with anything like the sympathy that he saw the America of the eighties and nineties?

*Edel*: I doubt it very much. I think that what bothered him was bigness. It would be just too big, there would be just too much of everything. We get it already in this book, the idea of the mass. For this tremendous anxiety about democracy he uses the word "monstrous," not because he's anti-democratic but he's worried at the kind of leveling that's going to take place; everything is going to be done on a mass scale. I think this would bother him today more than ever.

*Kazin*: There's no doubt that James would hate us on sight. On the other hand, there is one reason I have for offering a contrary opinion. When James came to America he was seeing what was called the social question . . .

*Bryson*: What *he* called the social question!

*Kazin*: No, what Upton Sinclair would have called it. That is, the social crisis of the time—the class war, the rise of wealth, the proletarianization of certain people. I won't say that struggle is over, but it has become more tranquil. America now is much more the welfare state than anyone would have dreamed of its being thirty years ago. It has achieved a certain informal quality of planning in many ways. Now James, I think, would have resigned himself to the fact that his world was completely out of date and would have looked with pure sympathy upon the sheer novelty of things. I'm thinking of Santayana, who in some ways is like James. Santayana during the war, in Rome, was as fascinated by the G.I.'s as Gertrude Stein was in France. A whole new generation had come along which had nothing to do with his world whatsoever. These young men and women represented an esthetic object apart from the vulgarity of the rest. It's also true that American life itself has become less vulgar in some ways. Maybe it's become too streamlined, it's become too cold and hard. After all, this is a world that loves Henry James—let's not forget it! All over the land young men and women are reading *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl* and *The American Scene* as they've never read them before. Wouldn't he have liked them for that reason?

*Bryson*: I imagine that one of Mr. Edel's books about Henry James will sell more copies now than any of James's own books ever did during his whole lifetime.

*Edel*: Well, I don't know.

*Bryson*: But the cult—no, that's not a good word, the *admiration*—for James isn't just pretense.

*Edel*: Oh, on the contrary!

*Bryson*: Isn't it because we are now able to enter into the kind of world that he cared about?

*Kazin*: Exactly. We Americans are the only people in the world who care about something called Europe as no European can. We have an international, even interplanetary, point of view which may

be too abstract, may be sort of empty as well as specious—but I think we do reflect some of his concerns.

*Edel:* We're also concerned with the role of the American in the world, and this is James's great subject.

*Bryson:* Yes, that's what he talked about and throws so much light on. Mr. Kazin mentioned Santayana. In one of his letters—I don't think he said it anywhere else—Santayana writes that of course no European, as he counted himself, could ever live in the kind of place America was going to be, but he believed that it might in the end be a greater civilization than any that had existed before.

*Kazin:* The real European mind (Santayana was one and James was trying to be one) was fascinated by America, though not always affectionate about it. Near the end of this book James has a note about California, which he had visited, and about which, as we know, he didn't write—the second volume never came through. But he was fascinated by California and in many ways it represented for him, as it often does for us, this period of American life. Of course, today's incredible architectural experimentation, this mixture of low culture and high culture in Hollywood, this mixture of European accents and juke boxes, all this would have seemed to James, needless to say, impossibly vulgar.

*Bryson:* Would you tell somebody nowadays to read this book?

*Edel:* Oh, I certainly would!

*Kazin:* I would have them read it for two reasons. First of all, James had the wit, the real literary wit, to see how much about America is interesting—things which the average man, the average scholar, passes over. And, secondly, most of all, it's the kind of book which no one today would even think of writing because it's a book which depends entirely upon personal reference, personal wit, personal freshness. It's not a sociological book. Nowadays a team of experts would go up and down the land, bringing back a lot of figures, and they would have a kind of mock humility, saying "I have to refer to my colleague about this." James took it all in; he wasn't afraid.

*Edel:* I would tell a young man to read this book to get this wonderful feeling of nostalgia, those descriptions of Concord, that marvelous sentence: "Not russet leaf fell for me while I was in Concord but fell with an Emersonian drop." It's very beautiful and it gives you the feeling of the past. I think that's something that I would like to give to young people.

*Bryson:* And you think this rushing, powerful, materialistic world that he feared so much has no sense of the past? That's one of our lacks?

*Kazin:* No, I think it *wants* to have a past, but that's being destroyed. After all, one of the great virtues of James was that his world was so enormous in time. He knew Emerson, he knew so many people of that old, now Arcadian world before the war; and now here he is in the New York and Baltimore and Washington of 1905, in a world which is exactly like our own, fundamentally. So that he's constantly comparing two civilizations. Nowadays we know only one

civilization. James knew three: the past, the present, and most of all the mind of Henry James.

*Bryson:* That is the function of the great artist: to help us to live in the great world as well as in our own.

## VIRGIL

### Georgics

(*As broadcast June 3, 1956*)

PALMER BOVIE • VICTOR R. YANITELLI, S.J. • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* In our school days we knew Virgil almost wholly for the *Aeneid*; and I suppose we might say that Virgil doesn't have the same standing as a world author that he had in the eighteenth century, particularly in England. But I think it's true that at the greatest height of his fame he was almost as well known for the *Georgics* as he was for the *Aeneid*. How would you describe the *Georgics*?

*Yanitelli:* I should think that the fascinating, almost antecedent, fact about the *Georgics* is that it's a farmer's handbook. The title itself means that it's the "facts" of farming—what a farmer does and how he lives.

*Bryson:* It took a great deal of courage for even a very great poet to take the "facts" of farming and attempt to write a great poem about them. And he succeeded.

*Yanitelli:* Indeed he did. I would say that part of his problem was to write another almanac in the tradition of Hesiod, the old Greek poet, who had written such a superlative one. And I suppose another problem is how to organize all these facts and set them forth in some kind of reasonable exposition. Virgil has several problems. He might have taken just one aspect of farming and dealt with it. Or he could have divided it into seasons, for example; that would have been a logical division.

*Bryson:* As many of his English imitators did.

*Bovie:* As James Thomson managed to do. But what Virgil saw was a kind of organic unity, almost a growth of subject matter in the structure.

*Yanitelli:* It's still difficult to see how this kind of material can be made the subject matter of art—although that's what we're saying that Virgil did with it, aren't we?

*Bovie:* Well, art is always particular and concrete and precise. It's full of images and descriptions. The remarkable thing about the

*Georgics*, like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, is that Virgil had to imagine the whole process of farming, and he did so in a rather deliberate and organic way. I would say he started with the soil, with the earth itself.

*Bryson*: That's the first book, isn't it? It's the earth, it's what the farmer is up against.

*Bovie*: The good earth and the bad earth, the intractable earth that fights against you unless you control it. This is the subject of the first book, what grows in the soil.

*Bryson*: And the weather . . .

*Bovie*: And the ever-fickle, mobile weather which works against you and works for you. You have to watch out for her. Virgil shows you the farmer scanning the skies for signs as to when to sow and to reap. In the second book he moves on to the inevitable olives and wine, so indispensable to the Roman economy, and the shrubs and woodlands that the farmer must deal with; he shows us, as it were, the landscape—beautiful, growing, flowering. Then in the third book he moves to animals—to the next plane, you might say, of activity on the good earth—animals that might roam across the landscape. And there he finds that animals are very much like human beings; they display aggression, and so on. And having dealt with animals, he turns in the fourth book to the bees, the always interesting study of what this society is like and its specialized product.

*Bryson*: Let's take these in order, and go back to the first book. The weather is more than fickle, the weather is vicious, too. I mean that "fickle" suggests just a little occasional indifference, whereas the weather is actually destructive.

*Bovie*: But productive, too. How could we be without it?

*Bryson*: That's exactly what I want to get at. Is man conquered by the intractable earth and the weather, or does Virgil give you the general feeling that man is after all master?

*Yanitelli*: That is, I think, the heart of the artistry in the whole of the *Georgics*, and it's at the heart of the spirit that makes this more than just an encyclopedic recitation of facts about the soil. No, man is very much a part of this soil and a part of this weather. But he is somehow undaunted; he lives with it. Sometimes he is set back and has difficulties, he must as *Genesis* says "live by the sweat of his brow"; but one always senses from Virgil the health and the goodness of this sweating with the soil.

*Bryson*: And of course Virgil was not the first nor the last to think there was a kind of moral virtue in sweat.

*Bovie*: Virgil conceived of man as the center of things. Hesiod would have said, I think, with Thoreau that the "mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." But Virgil might have gone him one better and said that the good hard-working Roman farmer leads a life of quiet *perspiration*.

*Bryson*: You speak of Hesiod because Virgil, in a sense, was carrying on the tradition of Hesiod, but it's a different spirit. I think we have to come back to that—why he's so different from his Greek forebears—after we've established what Virgil really thought.

*Yanitelli*: I was going to ask Mr. Bovie whether Virgil's attitude toward man doesn't bring out exactly what he was trying to say scientifically.

*Bovie*: You mean as a part of nature, but as the most important part? In Virgil man is not at the mercy of nature as he is in Lucretius. As Virgil moves into the fourth book, for example—to the bees as a model of human "beehivour," as the New Zealand bee-keeper might say . . .

*Bryson*: As long as you don't pun in Latin we'll let it go.

*Bovie*: Toward the end we have, in fact, a myth; we see someone in the human image—Aristaeus, the beekeeper, the shadowy Orpheus, the great civilizer and the great altruistic symbol in ancient myth. And so we do move from the soil and what goes into it and what grows from it to man himself, who, in fact, grows from it and is responsible for it.

*Bryson*: But in the second book, where he's talking about the landscape, you get those famous passages in which he rises to his lyric praise of the farmer's life. It's not the high point of the book, I suppose, in structure—I defer to you there, Mr. Bovie—but it is, in a sense, the lyric high; it's where he really is saying how wonderful it is to be a farmer. How does it sound in Latin, Father Yanitelli?

*Yanitelli*: Well, this should give you an idea of how Virgil's hexameters sound:

*O fortunatus nimium, sua si bona norint,  
agricolas! quibus ipsa, procul discordibus armis,  
fundit humo facilem victum iustissima tellus.  
si non ingentem furibus domus alta superbis  
mane salutantum totis vomit aedibus undam,  
nec varios inhiant pulchra testudine postis  
inlusasque auro vestis Ephyreiaque aera,  
alba neque Assyrio fucatur lana veneno,  
nec casia liquidi corrumpitur usus olivi:  
at secura quies et nescia fallere vita,  
dives opum variarum, at latis otia fundis,  
speluncae vivique lacus et frigida Tempe  
mugitusque boum mollesque sub arbore somni  
non absunt; illic saltus ac lustra ferarum,  
et patiens operum exiguoque adsueta iuventus,  
sacra deum sanctique patres: extrema per illos  
Iustitia excedens terris vestigia fecit.*

*Bryson*: Now you've put this into English, Mr. Bovie; how does that sound?

*Bovie*: The same passage in English—my English—would go like this:

*O that farmers understood their blessings!  
Their boundless joys! A land far off from war  
Pours forth her fruit abundantly for them.*



*Although no stately home with handsome portals  
Disgorges on its steps a wave of callers  
Every morning, gaping at his doors  
Inlaid with tortoise shell, astonished by  
His gold-trimmed clothes and his Corinthian bronzes,  
Although his white wool is not stained with dye,  
His oil not spoiled with perfumes from the East,  
His rest is sound, his life devoid of guile.  
His gains are manifold, his holdings broad:  
Caves and living lakes, refreshing vales,  
The cattle lowing, slumber in the shade.  
Familiar with the haunts of animals,  
The farmer lives in peace, his children all  
Learn how to work, respect frugality,  
Venerate their fathers and the gods:  
Surely, Justice, as she left the earth  
In parting left her final traces here.*

**Bryson:** I won't embarrass you by saying that I think that's pretty good *English* poetry, Mr. Bovie, but I do. It shows that the spirit with which Virgil approached this can be translated even into another language. But there are a lot of themes set forth in what you've just read: respect for the past and the mores of our fathers, the love of perspiration that we've already spoken of, and fear of war.

**Yanitelli:** I think one of the curious things about the writing of the *Georgics*, at a time when the whole future of Roman rule in the Mediterranean was at stake and in doubt, is that Virgil could turn to a productive, tranquil subject matter and make it sell, as it were—could put it across.

**Bryson:** Maybe he did it on purpose. Maybe he was shrewd enough as a literary man, as a man of letters—as a journalist, let's say—to know that people might want that.

**Bovie:** As a matter of fact, he was rather *asked* to do it, wasn't he?

**Yanitelli:** He was, in fact, told to do it. And the miracle is that being so commissioned, he could execute his commission so well, so intelligently and freely.

**Bryson:** But I've wondered whether in some of the political passages he didn't leave the proper names blank, so that after Anthony and Augustus had fought it out he could put in the right name, depending on who won. Do you suppose that's possible?

**Bovie:** It's quite possible but we'll never know for sure. We do know that he honored Augustus, who was then only called Octavian, as the hope of the future; and he was right, because after all it is the *pax Romana* not the *bellum Romanum* that ensued upon Octavian's elevation to power.

**Yanitelli:** Incidentally, isn't that reference to Octavian taken as a kind of prophecy or promise of the fact that Virgil was going to write an *Aeneid* in honor of the Roman glory?

**Bovie:** Yes. There would be the challenge to glorify Roman

might and power, and here is the challenge to glorify Roman know-how, the sagacious, canny engineering-type of thing.

*Bryson*: He goes on, in the third book, to something more self-indulgent, with its racing passions and great lyric energy. I think he had more fun writing the third book than he did the second.

*Bovie*: Oh yes, indeed. There's always *amor* somewhere in the poet, and this is its chance to come out. Take the battle of the bulls where the rival champion goes off and sulks and comes back in order to win the heifer away from his opponent; and then the passage *amor omnibus idem*, "love levels all," where we see all the animals rioting and instinctively driven out of control by the urge of the sexual instinct. That passage, I think, gives the animals an almost human quality, or at least it considers them from the human reflective point of view. And I'm fascinated by that because it is so much like Aesop. Aesop takes the foibles of human beings, their failures and their petty ambitions, and puts them into an animal setting, whereas Virgil seems to take out of the animals these things that are reflected in ourselves.

*Bryson*: Doesn't he get that from his other master, Lucretius, too? Because he says himself that he gets a great deal out of Lucretius. Although I can see very little of the spirit of Lucretius in Virgil anywhere, nevertheless this feeling that the love instinct works all through nature is certainly very deep in the Lucretian poem too.

*Bovie*: Oh yes, Lucretius studies passion in the animals as a test case. And not only do we have in the *Georgics* this review of animal passion, which is really what it ought to be called, I suppose, but we also have a plague descending on the herds at the end of the book, which is a strict imitation of Lucretius's sensational poetic style.

*Yanitelli*: St. Thomas Aquinas says that "love puts the lover outside of himself."

*Bovie*: That's very Virgilian, isn't it? Virgil doesn't like love but he realizes that as a poet he has to do something about it—and so he must dismiss Dido rather tragically in the *Aeneid* because love can get in the way of other things.

*Bryson*: Well, he doesn't exactly like love when it upsets the behavior of the domestic animals, Mr. Bovie, but at the same time he realizes that it's one of these basic energies that man is trying to engineer to his own purposes.

*Bovie*: I would say it's *the* basic energy . . .

*Bryson*: In another connection, Mr. Bovie, the word "scientific" came in. Now, in some ways, one is struck by Virgil's extraordinary differentiation, as between the patient ox and the warlike horse—well, of course, horses weren't used for farm work in Virgil's time at all, were they?

*Yanitelli*: We differ often in techniques from what Virgil has to say. His study of the ox and the horse is rather interesting as an insight into his own temperament. He studies the ox very sympathetically, seeing the tragic fate of what Aristotle called the "poor man's slave." But the horse he distrusts—he's a charger, he's aggressive, he's a weapon.

*Bryson*: Were horses used at all in his time for anything except war and racing?

*Yanitelli*: Not to my knowledge.

*Bryson*: Well, let's go back to "scientific." Did Virgil describe what actually went on? How good an agronomist was he?

*Bovie*: He seems to be pretty good with the facts, wouldn't you say, Father Yanitelli?

*Yanitelli*: I agree.

*Bryson*: A farmer could have run a farm pretty well if he'd followed Virgil's instructions?

*Bovie*: Crop rotation, irrigation, pruning, grafting, veterinary care, antidotes to snakes—these are all useful items.

*Yanitelli*: He's excellent on olive trees and vines, particularly.

*Bryson*: Of course, we haven't got to the bees yet.

*Bovie*: I was going to say about those blessed bees that they were perfect for Virgil because they had no sexual instinct, as far as he could discover (it wasn't discovered until around the end of the eighteenth century).

*Bryson*: Then he makes this wonderful mistake of calling the queen bee the king.

*Bovie*: This is a very Roman mistake, of course.

*Bryson*: You mean that a Roman wouldn't have admitted that it was a female, even if he'd been quite sure of it?

*Bovie*: Indeed not—those Roman matrons must have caused rather serious problems in the late republican society. It has to be a king and it has to be *the* ruler and it has to, somehow—I'm not quite sure how this works—pick its children off the leaves, as Virgil describes, and not undergo the throes of the sexual instinct.

*Yanitelli*: I think in this case, where we have a clear scientific error, that any farmer who had dealt with bees for six months would know enough not to be looking for them on the leaves of a tree.

*Bryson*: And, of course, the farmers of Virgil's time didn't read the *Georgics*, did they?

*Bovie*: They might have heard the more celebrated passages of it read out loud.

*Bryson*: Did it have a reputation in its own time? Virgil was commissioned to write a good poem about peace and the life of the farmer, and he did, he wrote a wonderful one. Then what happened?

*Bovie*: I would say that it was well received, but it was aimed, first of all, at the upper middle-class and the court circle. It would have circulated among the more sophisticated city dwellers who were sort of in charge of the agriculture program.

*Bryson*: The gentlemen farmers of that time.

*Bovie*: It wouldn't have filtered down in its entirety. And the real farmer often would have said "I'm afraid the man is just being poetic."

*Yanitelli*: I think we should remember that all these people in the court circle, especially after 29 B.C., were beginning to acquire villas in the country. If they didn't have a personal background of

rural life, at least they went out and used it for relaxation, and took a gentleman's interest in this sort of thing. There's no doubt about the fact that the *Georgics* was popular at the time, so far as we can find out.

*Bryson*: Now, what about the politics of the bees? Here's a man who, under a great dictator, turns out a poem on peace in which he shows the hive of bees with its complete and absolute domination by a king, but there are a few little doubts strung along. Is he praising totalitarianism here?

*Yanitelli*: He is clearly not praising totalitarianism. I think the story of the bees is one way for the poet to tell us of the social implications of rural living as related to the society and the state in which it takes place. Virgil, I think, wanted peace as well as order—I don't know if you can make a distinction between the two—but I would certainly say that he did not want peace at any price.

*Bryson*: But the bees have a peace enforced by order. Is that the kind of peace he wanted?

*Yanitelli*: No, he wanted freedom to enjoy the things of earth and the things of nature.

*Bovie*: I think freedom is the key word. The only trouble, really, with bees—and Virgil knows this—is that they're slaves.

*Bryson*: Slaves to their own society?

*Bovie*: They are slaves to their own principle of absolute organization and technical efficiency. If you want technique, if you want efficiency, here it is. But in this totalitarian bee society, what happens if the king goes? Everything falls apart; it's too closely machined, too perfect. Virgil very deliberately points out that the bees worship their leader more slavishly than Persians or Egyptians. So there is some attempt for freedom and a certain irony, a sense of parity, and a lovely feeling of model—the sort of thing that Swift did when he wrote about the bees in *The Battle of the Books*, and gave us that imperishable phrase "sweetness and light."

*Bryson*: Let's go back to the poetry of all this.

*Bovie*: Well, this is a curious poem in that it is so factual and so straightforward. Virgil is always after us with facts, and in a way the concrete results, the farmer's reward, is what Virgil wants us to see; he wants us to see the abundance, the images of pigs stuffed with acorns and the fat round olive dear to peace and the wild strawberries bursting out on an autumn hillside. He's converted the material directly into poetic image and into descriptive verse of a very fine sort. I feel, however, that as Virgil he has infused a feeling and an idea and a purpose into the whole subject. So that it isn't just inert subject matter, and we have in the end a figure of someone I would call a hero, namely, Aristaeus and Orpheus—especially Orpheus, who is a symbol of cultivated man.

*Bryson*: This is not Orpheus, the mystery god, the magician . . .

*Bovie*: Not the mystery Orpheus, but the god of agriculture who bends nature to his will with his song and who expands his total effort to recover his beloved bride—working for someone else. The

reciprocal expenditure of energy, I think, is part of his purpose in forming the whole poem.

*Bryson*: And this raises it to a kind of height?

*Bowie*: . . . which brings it to much more than a sweet little narrative ending, to a tragic winning climax—a paean to human effort, to *laborare et orare*.

*Yanitelli*: *Laborare et orare*, of course, is one of the medieval monastic ideals whereby the toil in the field and even the toil over a manuscript being painfully copied out on parchment . . .

*Bryson*: Labor and prayer.

*Yanitelli*: Very good, Mr. Bryson; that puts it very neatly.

*Bowie*: Virgil has shown us, too, that work has its reward and that purposeful, peaceful and productive energy has its incalculable benefit. Today in the work of the late Louis Bromfield—so eloquent on the subject of farming and such a creative mind himself—the same message comes through. In Robert Frost, in his canny, realistic, pastoral verse, we're in the country and yet we appreciate and see what it means to us.

*Yanitelli*: In the field and in the *Georgics* I think we see that man's body is not only benefited but also his spirit. There's only attention to life and the promotion of it, and matter is sanctified by man's effort to understand it and to make it produce.

*Bryson*: Virgil, in a sense, humanized Hesiod and his Greek models. We impute to the Romans a combination of practicality and brutality. He had the practicality, all right, the great constructive power—but he also had a deep human sympathy.

## GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

### *The Sentimental Education*

(As broadcast June 10, 1956)

VIRGILIA PETERSON

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PIERRE SZAMEK

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: It may be a bit puzzling to call *The Sentimental Education* Flaubert's "other" book, because Flaubert, more than any other of the really great writers of the world, had two quite different careers. He wrote historical and romantic novels like *Salammbô*, for instance, and he wrote a group of realistic novels like *Madame Bovary*. *The Sentimental Education* is among the realistic novels, the "other" book from *Bovary*, but it's also an "other" book from that more self-indulgent manner in which he went back to ancient Carthage or to ancient Syria for his settings and story.

*Peterson*: I would say this book is much closer to Flaubert than *Madame Bovary* because it really follows his own experience, almost year by year. He himself went to study law in Paris in 1840 and stayed there for about two years and didn't enjoy it at all—just as the hero of this book, Frédéric Moreau, studies law and abandons it for various other things. This book is a picture of the habits and customs and political opinions and ways in love of that period, and much of it simply reflects Flaubert's own experience.

*Szamek*: It seems to me that whenever a writer sits down to work on a novel he will dip into his own memories and shuffle his own past like little file cards . . .

*Bryson*: But that's generally in his *first* novel. Don't most novelists write almost pure autobiography in their first book and then, if they're any good, go on to create something else?

*Szamek*: Yes, of course they do, but there always lingers this detritus of the past. You cannot escape from that.

*Peterson*: Well, none lingers in *Madame Bovary*. Flaubert simply took a famous case of adultery and suicide and wrote it almost word-for-word as it had transpired in a small town in France.

*Bryson*: Nobody commits suicide in *The Sentimental Education*; nobody takes himself quite that seriously.

*Szamek*: No! And do you know why?

*Bryson*: Why?

*Szamek*: Because if they tried to shoot themselves they'd miss.

*Bryson*: They're very stupid people, but is that because Flaubert made them stupid or because that's the way he saw life?

*Szamek*: I'm afraid that he saw life that way, and in a sense it is like that. It's a sad and tired business at times. I resent parts of this book, and particularly what to me is the crux of it. In one scene the hero, Frédéric Moreau, a young law student, is dallying with one of the heroines and he has her on his knee and thinks to himself, "what a rascally part I am playing!"—these are the words of Flaubert—while at the same time he's admiring his own perversity. Now one moment, Miss Peterson—I know you're most anxious to answer this, but let me conclude what I have to say: this seems to me to be a semantic error. This man is not a rascal; he's a fool.

*Peterson*: Mr. Szamek, you're awfully unfair. Anyone can lift anything out of context. He was only having an affair with that woman because she was noble and rich, and he came from the provinces and was a snob—there is no doubt about it—but you fail to give the impression of the book when you say "one of his love affairs." There was only one real dominating love affair in his life; it was never fulfilled, as it were, but it remained a guidepost in the life of Frédéric Moreau and in the life of Flaubert, too.

*Szamek*: That may very well be, but he is saying this about himself; I'm not saying it about him. This is what he thinks of himself.

*Bryson*: But this is only one aspect of the novel. There are two main themes: there's love and there's politics, which, I suppose, were

the two proper preoccupations of the young men in Paris in the eighteen-forties.

*Peterson*: The two proper preoccupations of everyone at all times.

*Bryson*: All right, I'll accept that. But isn't it important to show that the young man's various affairs—trivial, illicit, snobbish, and downright degrading in some cases—are merely attempts to balance the fact that the one woman whom he really loved was inaccessible to him? Not a very good remedy, if you like, but nevertheless . . .

*Szamek*: A typical human remedy for an incorrigible situation. But this woman in the novel, Madame Arnoux, was probably Lisa Schlesinger in his own life.

*Bryson*: You mean in Flaubert's own life?

*Peterson*: Yes. He met her when he was fifteen and she was twenty-six and married to a music publisher (in the novel it's an art dealer). The relationship between Frédéric, Madame Arnoux, and her husband is, of course, the central theme of the book. But I would beg to disagree that Frédéric is an entire fool and that all these people are hopelessly sordid. They are no more sordid than everyone we know.

*Szamek*: He may not be an entire fool, but he throws himself into the attempt with great zealousness. After all, what do we have here? This story begins with a young man who is about to start his courses in law at the university in Paris; he is on board a river steamer; he sees a woman who is to him extremely enticing . . .

*Bryson*: And Flaubert makes her seem so, too!

*Szamek*: Yes, she does seem so. She's an appealing and compelling sort of person, but she is married. We discover that very shortly. She has a child. And this young man, who is some—what?—twenty years younger than she decides that he wants this married woman; he pursues her relentlessly for some six hundred and seventy pages of panting energy and . . .

*Bryson*: And never gets her!

*Peterson*: "Panting energy" is not a real description of it, because he's sedulously careful not to offend her sensibilities or her virtue.

*Szamek*: The more fool he, Miss Peterson!

*Peterson*: He always wanted her to succumb to him voluntarily. He never tried to force her.

*Szamek*: I know what you're thinking now: the eternal male, the happily strutting peacock. But it's not that here. He isn't posturing and posing in the hope that she will succumb completely; he is strumming on the lyre and singing happy songs at the same time. He's working very assiduously to get this woman for himself, and he's a complete scoundrel while doing it.

*Bryson*: But what, then, is his education? After all, Madame Arnoux succeeds in resisting him to the end of the story, where we have that wonderful final scene in which they sort of decide that maybe it is better this way and part forever. What's his education?

*Peterson*: I think the "sentimental education" is in the preservation of the ideal. In that last scene, when she comes to see him, she takes her hat off, and he discovers that her hair is white. This is a terrible shock to him; he kneels at her feet and tells her how much she's meant to him all his life. He hopes he believes what he's saying, but there's a reservation inside him. She says that she hoped she could make him happy and he thinks perhaps she had come to offer herself, but he isn't sure and he's afraid of degrading the ideal. He's afraid of disgust. He wants to preserve this one thing in his life that really has been untarnished. He gets up and goes to the other side of the room to make himself a cigarette, whereupon she says "How wonderful it is that you are so delicate," and she leaves. It's terrific.

*Szamek*: If you will allow me to be brutally ungallant, Flaubert points out very carefully that he has not overlooked the fact that by this time her hair is white.

*Bryson*: Then are you saying, you two, that Flaubert intends to convey to us that it's better to pursue an ideal and not reach it, and that experiences on the way don't really matter?

*Peterson*: I don't think that's quite it. I think Flaubert himself was a romantic . . .

*Bryson*: Oh, certainly he was!

*Peterson*: Romantic in the sense that he was continually being gnawed at by the vision of how glorious people could be, how noble they could be, and how inept they really are. This one thing, this one experience in his hero's life, was an untarnished ideal; what made it perfect is not that it wasn't realized, but that it is one thing that even an inept person couldn't spoil.

*Bryson*: You say he's a romantic. That's the most important thing to understand about Flaubert. He's a romantic who, with one of his quill pens, wrote those ironic realistic novels in which he suppresses his own romanticism and almost makes fun of the romanticism of other people.

*Szamek*: You seem to be defending him now.

*Bryson*: I'm not defending him, I'm trying to understand him.

*Szamek*: Well, my objection is that here is a man who studies law . . .

*Bryson*: Are you talking about Flaubert?

*Szamek*: No, I'm coming back to Frédéric through the eyes of Flaubert. Here is a man who studies law and fails; who writes a book, or starts one and never finishes it; who starts affairs with women and leaves them inconclusive; who enters politics and is ignominiously defeated; and who, finally, more or less goes out with a bang in his own mind, but a whimper in that of everyone else.

*Peterson*: Flaubert said that Frédéric was a man portrayed in all his weaknesses. He makes him a Walter Mitty. He makes him a man who saw himself as a great lawyer, painter, musician, diplomat, deputy—anything you like, even a fur trapper in America when he was in despair, or a genius in a garret. He saw himself, but he was incapable of doing any of these things. All he did was to spend too



much money and get into trouble and have one woman going out the back door while another was coming in the front.

*Bryson*: Flaubert is saying: "This is the way I was when I was young, and this is the way most young men are. If you don't like it, it's just too bad, but that's the way they are."

*Peterson*: He never takes the vision away, so it's all right.

*Szamek*: This is the very point that makes it strange. I don't think every young man is like that. This book seems to give the impression of amatory Keystone cops, one coming in the back door and the other going out the front. But Frédéric is actually a man who is running away from himself and never quite succeeds.

*Peterson*: I don't think we're being quite fair to *The Sentimental Education* in talking entirely about Frédéric Moreau. This book has the most marvelous scenes in it; nobody but Flaubert could have written them.

*Szamek*: That is true.

*Peterson*: Do you remember when Frédéric takes his demimondaine to the races? All the different carriages, the rain coming down, the wheels going round and round, the people saluting each other, and the gossip; the woman he loved seeing him in the carriage with the wrong woman, having always thought his love was pure; all the trouble he gets into; and then going back to the restaurant afterwards with this demimondaine, where he thought at last he was going to succeed in his nefarious purposes, but she walks out on him with someone else and he's furious because his real love had been slighted and his concupiscence had been betrayed—it's all there and set down with miraculous vitality.

*Szamek*: These are the things that save the book from my point of view. This kind of vibrant, exciting description—and then suddenly the shift to a very deep and sensitive, almost idealistic, thinking. I don't know whether you recall the passage in which he speaks of the royal palaces, the royal residences, which have been closed. That to me is almost like a moment frosted in amber. The buildings have been closed for a long time, and yet he senses the shadows and the ghostly footfalls which have passed through them. It's the scene in which the two lovers—there are always lovers in this book—are strolling through the palace.

*Peterson*: Through Fontainebleau.

*Bryson*: But he can't repress his romanticism even here. It comes out in these moments of gentleness where he drops his irony and goes completely sentimental himself.

*Peterson*: We haven't said anything about the demonstrations that took place in Paris under Louis Philippe during that time, the great European revolution of 1848, when the public broke into the Tuileries and destroyed everything. Frédéric watches that.

*Bryson*: Yes, but you're still seeing the political revolutions of the forties through the eyes of this—what shall we call him?—commonplace young man.

*Peterson*: No, *average*.

*Bryson*: Average?

*Szamek*: No, he's not average. He fails in everything he does.

*Peterson*: Don't we mostly?

*Szamek*: Well, it's nice to think we don't—or at least it's nice to think that we try to reach for the stars, and if we don't attain them we scrape some stardust off on our fingertips.

*Bryson*: Flaubert didn't believe that. He may have believed it when he was writing something like *Salammô* or *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, but he didn't when he was writing *Madame Bovary* or *The Sentimental Education*; at any rate, he didn't let himself say so.

*Szamek*: Because these are the two sides, again, of the man. In *Salammô* he sees things through clouds of opulent incense, but here he's the deep, soured realist.

*Bryson*: When you say we are defending the book, what are we defending it against?

*Szamek*: You were defending it against me because I was nasty enough to attack it.

*Bryson*: Is it because you don't like the people in it? I don't either.

*Szamek*: It's mostly that I dislike the people. They're rather fruitless and hopeless.

*Bryson*: Flaubert says that's the way people are.

*Szamek*: Yes, they are, and Miss Peterson is most anxious to deny it. Miss Peterson likes people more than Flaubert did.

*Peterson*: I think he had no compassion for people in general, but for each individual he had compassion. For the individual failure he had genuine pity as well as contempt. It was an extraordinary combination. He showed the things that he had contempt for, and at the same time he showed how inevitable they are—how we're all like that. I don't think it's a cynical book, and this is what I object to: I'm defending it against the accusation of anything as cheap as cynicism.

*Szamek*: Well, I'll tell you my true feelings. It's that I like Flaubert and I dislike Frédéric Moreau; when I view him through the eyes of Flaubert, I like the book. I like Flaubert when he's speaking of an astringent young woman and says of her: "She had the look of a Gothic virgin." I like a man who can say that. You can just get the feeling—deep-steeped in Listerine. It's wonderful.

*Peterson*: Is it the expression of a cynic, then, when he says: "Moreover, the profound affections in life resemble honest women; they're afraid of being discovered and walk through life with their eyes downcast"?

*Bryson*: When you get into a depth of philosophic wit like that, it's very hard to say whether the man is being cynical or not; is he cynical or is he just struggling awfully hard to tell the truth? I think I would say, on Mr. Szamek's side, that I don't enjoy reading this book; but it fills me with the most profound admiration, because no other author that I know gives me so much of a feeling of the reality of life. It's a kind of sour taste, but it's so overpoweringly real.

*Peterson*: It's more like ashes, but that is what you get out of life if you look at it the way it is.

*Szamek*: Flaubert himself says that somewhere. He puts it into the words of Deslauriers, one of his characters, who says: "Heroes have about them a bad smell."

*Bryson*: And, of course, he means morally.

*Szamek*: No, he means it emotionally, I think. He is speaking of the men of the Republic.

*Bryson*: Those are the *political* heroes.

*Peterson*: Well, there's only one real hero, I suppose, and that's a secondary figure who was a hero of the barricades and who was then killed by a Socialist toward the end. He is a man whom you feel Flaubert admires fully.

*Szamek*: Yes, one of the few he could. The tragic thing about this, I think, is that Flaubert seems to have the idea that he likes a noble savage but prefers to have him on a leash.

*Bryson*: Well, when he gets him out on a barricade and has him killed, isn't that the ultimate irony? Killed by a Socialist, too—somebody who ought to be on his side.

*Peterson*: But the heroes always are killed! They have to be.

*Bryson*: Yes, but they don't always have to be killed by people on their own side.

*Peterson*: It doesn't really matter.

*Bryson*: Oh, yes, it does! Because this man is in a sense betrayed, and that seems to me one of the most ironical things in the book.

*Peterson*: Betrayal, if you like, is one of the themes of the book. Everyone is betraying everyone else. Frédéric even betrays Madame Arnoux.

*Szamek*: Have we made very clear what the general outline of this story is, Mr. Bryson and Miss Peterson?

*Bryson*: I think we've probably confused it thoroughly.

*Szamek*: But perhaps we can explain it: this young lawyer lives at home with his mother, comes to Paris to study law, fails bitterly, goes home to his mother, and finds that the life there is very empty, too; he comes back to Paris, lives there for some time in happy dissolution with woman after woman, finally comes into a very tidy legacy left by an uncle, and then gets more fuddled than ever and has three distinct mistresses, happily apportioned in various sections of the city; and he goes on with them until he finally discovers, at the end of the book, that nothing has really mattered in his life and that he's failed in everything.

*Bryson*: Even the pursuit, the futile pursuit all through this, of the one woman whom he loved and couldn't get—*that* didn't matter even at the end?

*Peterson*: I think it mattered, and I don't think he feels that nothing has happened. At the end of the book he's with his friend Deslauriers, who is a rather sharp lawyer by this time, and they go back over what they've shared together in the way of experiences. And they ask each other quite instinctively: "Was it our childhood experiences together that is the best that we've had?"

*Bryson*: Yes, because they certainly hadn't treated one another with honor and decency after they grew up.

*Peterson*: One had sought love, the other had sought power, and neither of them had got it, but this is the story of life itself.

*Szamek*: They have simply discovered the eternal truth, that the two saddest statements in life are "it might have been" and "do you remember?" And this is what they're saying at the end.

*Bryson*: They're saying that, but always with this ironical twist that Flaubert gets into it. We're leaving out not only the great scenes which carry this book along, but the fact that here is a picture, still very sound after a hundred years, of the French people in politics.

*Peterson*: A most extraordinary picture of the French people in politics, about which he had no illusions at all. He described a dinner party where they were having a political discussion and says that most of the men there had served at least four governments and "would have sold France and even the human species itself to insure their fortune or to save themselves a discomfort, or an embarrassment or even by maybe simple baseness and instinctive adoration for force." And then he says about France herself: "No longer conscious of a master [this is when Louis Philippe has abdicated], she began to cry out in fright like a blind man without a stick, like a little child who has lost his nurse."

*Bryson*: It's important to distinguish between the two parts of that indictment, Miss Peterson. He doesn't think that France is incapable of governing itself only because it's corrupt.

*Peterson*: Not at all!

*Bryson*: This love of force and leadership is also there.

*Peterson*: It's the same story that has taken place in our time. It makes it quite clear that there's no use in treating the history of France in our particular time as a singular experience.

*Szamek*: It has never changed in French politics. This is the pity and the degradation of the government of France.

*Peterson*: Why just France? Isn't it the pity and the degradation of most governments?

*Szamek*: Certainly not to such an extent as in France. No French government ever stays in power for any length of time.

*Bryson*: The French say quite properly that they keep the same policy and change governments, while other countries change policy and keep the same government. I think there's a good deal of truth in that. But what I can't understand, and Flaubert doesn't tell us, is how the perfectly extraordinary, the almost unexampled French civilization of the nineteenth century could have been achieved by people who were so politically and socially inept. The same question arises regarding the ancient Greeks and some other peoples. How could the French have made Paris what it was in the nineteenth century when everything they did politically seems to have been mistaken and stupid?

*Peterson*: Couldn't the same thing be said about us in America, that we are always blundering through? Isn't that the whole history of mankind?

*Bryson*: Well, the British are supposed to have made a conscious political principle of it. We never have. If we've done it, we've done it involuntarily.

*Peterson*: But it's the pussyfooting and the sycophantism and the opportunism that really makes Flaubert so angry, and where don't we see that sort of thing in political life?

*Bryson*: Is it Flaubert's own nature that makes him see mankind—that is, the ordinary mankind of his own time—through such extremely dirty glasses?

*Szamek*: That's exactly what he's doing. He's looking at a scene in *La Bohème* through dirty glasses.

*Bryson*: Yes. Is that his own nature?

*Szamek*: I think it is, yes.

*Peterson*: I don't see it that way. I think he's an agonized romantic, desperately disillusioned by what he sees and continually holding up a vision. I don't think he sees it through dirty glasses.

*Bryson*: There is a vision, too, in *The Sentimental Education*?

*Peterson*: The vision is certainly there on the sentimental side, and it may even be there on the political side. I see it. It's never stated, but it's behind. It's the implication of the book. They're failing to reach this, they're failing to reach that, but still they *might* reach it.

*Szamek*: But what is love to him and what is the question of politics to him? I don't know. It isn't clear to me. What is love to Frédéric, Miss Peterson?

*Peterson*: It would have been to settle down with Madame Arnoux and he couldn't. It might have failed because these things sometimes do, after you think they won't. But Flaubert implies that this was the relationship that would have been perfect for him and, because he couldn't have it, everything else that he does in an amatory way is done out of spite.

*Szamek*: It may be so. If it is, however, then his trouble is that he is an upper-class snob who is writing for middle-class morality and is lost in a morass between.

*Peterson*: I think you're just as much a cynic, Mr. Szamek, as Flaubert, if you don't mind.

*Szamek*: Oh, I'm afraid I am—and that's why I think he's fuddled, too, by the question of love. What is love to him? He doesn't know. Love should be the period of confusion in a man's life between the instant he discovers a goddess and the moment he finds out she wears size eleven shoes, and then the realization that it doesn't really matter.

*Peterson*: It's a very personal thing, love. It's like saying "what is God?" You can't pin love down so easily, Mr. Szamek. I think he has a concept of love which raises it from the sordid kind of thing that we get in our current literature—which is also an attempt to see the shady side of human life, and which has such narrowness and smallness and no vision behind it at all.

*Bryson*: When Mr. Szamek says it doesn't really matter, he might have meant one of two things. I think it's the confusion be-

tween those two things that really bothers Flaubert all the way through this book. Does it matter that the woman is not a goddess or does it matter that she's a woman? Does it matter that he's in love with her or does it matter that she wears size eleven shoes? That is, is he discarding love or is he accepting her humanity? It's the struggle between those two things in man's sentimental educational that Flaubert is trying to give us, and perhaps some confusion would be to his artistic purpose. After all, it's a confused business.

## WALT WHITMAN

### *Democratic Vistas*

(As broadcast June 17, 1956)

ERIC LARRABEE • ROBERT J. MANNING • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* All of Whitman isn't in *Democratic Vistas*. And yet, in a very interesting way, the essence of his attitude toward politics—particularly his theory about the function of a poet as a kind of political maker of society—shows up more clearly here than in his poetry.

*Larrabee:* But no one ever forgets in reading *Democratic Vistas* that the author is the author of *Leaves of Grass*. He is writing quite consciously as a poet; indeed, one is reminded of a single poem in *Leaves of Grass* in which he addresses himself to the poets to come after him and asks them, in substance, to justify him.

*Bryson:* To justify him?

*Larrabee:* To justify him as a poet, as the man (he speaks of himself as the American of the nineteenth century) that he was. He wanted poetry, the poetry that came after, to prove that he was right.

*Bryson:* And, of course, he had a very strong sense of needing something to be proved right. His own experience was a lifelong struggle of trying, in the first place, to get people to think he was writing poetry, and, second, to think it was poetry worth reading.

*Manning:* He was writing as a poet, but with the suggestion that there was so much more to be said by poets for and about America than he had found himself able to say. There is a sense of disappointment with himself and with democracy as it had performed up to then.

*Bryson:* Would you agree, Mr. Larrabee, that he was disappointed in democracy? He was disappointed rather in the American people, wasn't he?

*Larrabee:* He never speaks of those two as being separate. He thinks they're exactly the same.

*Bryson*: He didn't think democracy was a bad idea, he just thought we hadn't realized its potentialities?

*Larrabee*: He thought its performance was bad.

*Manning*: I should have made that clear. He is extremely disappointed with the way the idea has been carried out, or has *not* been carried out, up to the point in the late 1860s when he wrote these two essays.

*Larrabee*: He speaks of democracy in some very curious ways, too. Although he does use it as a synonym for the American people, he also is referring to it as a political system. He repeatedly says that they are not the same thing but he obviously regards them as necessary to one another. And you have the feeling sometimes, as I think Richard Chase has suggested, that Whitman's ideas about democracy didn't go very much further than the Founding Fathers. It was something *received* by Americans, whose duty and obligation was then to perfect it. He says at one point: "What terrible duties have the founders left to us!" You don't feel that he had ideas about projecting democracy into the future. He continually makes statements such as "the United States in its fruition [a favorite word of Whitman's] must make old history a dwarf." The vigor and excitement of that idea is conveyed scores of times in *Democratic Vistas*, but one thing that I think the book leaves us without is a clear idea of what Whitman means by making old history a dwarf, what it is he wants us to do.

*Bryson*: It's a perfectly clear, isn't it, that he knows who's to do it? The poet is to do it. That is, he's to tell people how to do it. But what it is that he's supposed to do, I would agree, is a little vague.

*Larrabee*: He wants to bring into being a race of wonderful people whom he can describe with deep feeling. Democracy's function is to him the production of this kind of individual; and when he starts talking about what kind of race these Americans are going to be, his tremendous passion and zeal and joy in it come through. Again, as Mr. Manning says, he is not awfully specific.

*Manning*: Maybe we should insert right here what he thinks of the American people as they stood at that moment, about 1870: "Society in these states is cankered, crude, superstitious, and rotten." And then he goes on at considerable and vigorous length to say that the whole country suffers from a disease called "hollowness of the heart," that "it's time for us to examine ourselves" and, in effect, begin to find out how to be the people that Whitman, I think, half hoped we would be by this time—particularly after having gone through such a terrible war at such a terrible cost and with such a terrible demand on our energies, only to produce disappointment.

*Bryson*: But isn't it true that this indictment must be put against the fact that the Civil War was a struggle in which human beings showed the most extraordinary spiritual and heroic gifts? This is a curious combination in his mind.

*Larrabee*: It's the tawdry commercial aftermath of the war that's bothering him; the war itself was to him a tremendous spiritual experience. In a sense he seems almost to regard it as the moment when

the nation discovered itself. Much as the horror of this spectacle moved him, it also moved him with its grandeur. He feels both of these things.

*Manning*: After this living proof of the grandeur that was possible, a sort of sinking-back seemed to have taken place—and I think inevitably had to take place after such a war. Whitman is writing out of a sense of disappointment, but at the same time out of a certainty that grandeur is possible, having seen it in the war.

*Larrabee*: Let's not overdo the parallel, but there are certain similarities to the present period.

*Bryson*: I suppose there are—in a kind of a spiritual letdown, a malaise that comes to all people after a great war. Isn't that more or less what history would show, this history that's to be dwarfed? Now the physical side of it, which you mentioned a minute ago, is perfectly clear. He expects big, handsome, strong, healthy, wholesome—I hate to use the word "wholesome," it's become almost a perjorative . . .

*Larrabee*: He uses worse words.

*Bryson*: I know. But he wanted a lot of people who would look well driving an open car along a country road; it's a kind of big, outdoor—I use it with a complete lack of prejudice—*Boy Scout* idea of what a great citizen would be.

*Manning*: There's one question that Whitman raises with this book (as a matter of fact he raises many questions and doesn't answer them all, which is not an indictment by any means). But did he want *all* of these people he was talking about to be poets, or did he want them to be led and directed in their ideas by a limited number of poets?

*Larrabee*: My own feeling is that he regarded the function of the poet as pretty special. I don't think he would have thought that many people were up to it. He speaks so often of the poet's vocation and sense of calling—so often of this extraordinary figure whom I wish he wouldn't call "the literatus"—that it's difficult to suppose he meant that the commonalty, much as he loved and hoped for them, could all become poets.

*Bryson*: This brings up the thing which to me is the essential flaw, if it is one, in Whitman's idea of democracy: he didn't think of everybody as having a share in creating this great civilization. He thought of people as being *led* into it, rather than doing it for themselves. Am I doing him an injustice?

*Manning*: I think you are. He didn't believe that the poet necessarily *led*. I am willing to grant that he often says this, but he also says that the poet is the "vessel of the national spirit."

*Larrabee*: The nation speaks *through* the poet.

*Manning*: He says at one point in this book that the literature, songs, and esthetics of a country are important principally because they furnish the materials and suggestions of personality for the men and women of the country, and force them in a thousand effective ways . . .

*Bryson*: Then the idea of leadership comes back, Mr. Manning.

*Manning*: I gather that the idea of leadership, of a sort of in-



tellectual policing, is one of the things that Whitman was getting at.

*Bryson*: It troubles me, though. He says it's the function of the "literatus"—I don't like that word either, but after all he insists on it—to give words to the national will, to make it explicit and effective.

*Larrabee*: Yes, he does.

*Bryson*: But he himself fails to give words to his own idea completely; is it the creative spirit of the people that speaks through the poet, or is it the other way round?

*Larrabee*: Well, cause and effect is not one of his strongest areas. I think it's asking too much of him that he should straighten out this tangled relationship at the same time that he poses it so fully and so beautifully.

*Bryson*: After all, we've had a hundred years more and we're still confused.

*Larrabee*: We're still working on it. I think the closest he gets to defining the role he gives to the poet in this curious polar relationship is toward the end of *Democratic Vistas*. There he speaks of this new race that's coming into being, and says that the poet helps Americans to understand what they are.

*Manning*: I find myself wondering how much of what Whitman was asking for has been produced in these past hundred years.

*Bryson*: That brings us back to just *what* was he asking for, other than vigorous bodies and clean and wholesome minds and hearts.

*Manning*: And good tastes.

*Bryson*: And good poets. Now, he *could* be talking about something which the most snobbish of modern conservatives might ask for—a lot of very handsome, wholesome, hard-working, clean-minded, clean-living peasants. Now you know that isn't what he meant.

*Larrabee*: Certainly not.

*Bryson*: And yet he seems almost to be saying it. What did he mean beyond that?

*Larrabee*: He says always that these matters come to a spiritual center. He puts poetry above religion in solving this problem, and then puts metaphysics above poetry.

*Bryson*: Not being quite sure, I think, just what he meant by the word metaphysics.

*Larrabee*: He read it somewhere.

*Bryson*: Perhaps he had a feeling that the people themselves would have a spiritual sensitivity to the poet, they would understand him and understand themselves.

*Manning*: Yes, and in this respect perhaps it's worked out in a way slightly different from what Whitman was then looking for. He prophesied a large group of people who would accept and nourish a rather small community of quite singular poets. The fact is that we do not have a community of what could be called singular poets today. The explanation may not be that we haven't got a lot of good poets so much as that many more people now read, attempt to write, and attempt to think and to examine themselves in the way that Whitman was saying the poets should do.

*Bryson*: And does this answer your question as to whether or not we had realized in our own way, in the historically possible way, what he wanted without its being exactly what he described?

*Manning*: I think so.

*Larrabee*: And this is something that Whitman had no hint of; nothing he had seen could have enabled him to visualize this kind of world. Certainly he saw little of the industrialism which has made all this possible. There is a large question in my mind whether he would have liked it. But this growth of people is exactly what he wanted, although it's come in ways that he might not have wanted.

*Manning*: One of his demands for America was its own forms of art, poetry, schools, and theology; he wanted them to displace other forms that turned us back to Europe and Asia. They haven't necessarily done that, but it seems to me that we have been developing very lustily our own forms of art.

*Larrabee*: This was one of the respects in which he himself remained prisoner of Europe and was never quite able to get away from it. His image of the poet is a European image; he couldn't quite see the real substantive nature of these other art forms, much as his viscera was telling him that they were desirable.

*Bryson*: There I quite agree with you, Mr. Larrabee: we shouldn't ask him to. As a famous American sociologist once remarked, you can believe in the future without knowing quite what it's going to be or, probably, being able to live in it when it comes. I'm not sure that Whitman would like the form which our realization of his dreams has taken. How much is he bound not only by his time but by one aspect of his time—his Jeffersonianism, if I can call it that? The idea that the ideal person is the healthy farmer living on his own land, sweating a bit, but getting wet with the rain and the sweat rather than the grime of industry.

*Larrabee*: This was perfectly possible even in the Brooklyn that he knew; it was a rural community. He speaks of farms and country lanes in what is now Brooklyn Heights. Even the Manhattan island that he knew and loved was surrounded, for one thing, by something as simple as clean water. The virtues that he attributes even to a great city are now, to our mind, curiously rural. And I would agree with your use of Jeffersonian as a word for the kind of rural base that he put under his idea of democracy. He certainly thought that a periodic revivifying bath in nature, which he himself gloried in taking, was necessary to the good democratic man and that, by extension, the same sort of experience with nature was necessary to a healthy democracy.

*Bryson*: Would two weeks of camping once a year have satisfied him as the bath of nature?

*Larrabee*: I think he would have put up with it if he had to. But the thing that puzzles me about this is that his own use of "nature" is pretty wide; he might have been willing—he might even have been able—to include in "nature" all of the city toils and troubles that we now separate off from it completely.

*Manning*: And I think, too, that his "taking to the open road" might have included riding the rods of a freight train.

*Bryson*: He might have been happy to cross the great prairies on a train, but would he have been happy to go through the railyards of Pittsburgh or Detroit?

*Manning*: That scene perhaps would have dismayed him in many ways, but I found myself thinking that he would have been pretty much at home in many things that are here now. Being a member of the same school that you are, the school of optimists about America, I think he would still find himself writing what he wrote then, in *The Song of the Universal*:

*Out of the bulk, the morbid and the shallow,  
Out of the bad majority, the varied countless  
    frauds of men and states,  
Electric, antiseptic yet, cleaving, suffusing all,  
Only the good is universal.*

And I think Whitman would still be excited by a sense that the seed of good, of powerful good, is in American society. All these criticisms that he makes in *Democratic Vistas* might still be made, but that same spirit of excitement about getting rid of these conditions would still be here—and the smoke and the grime and the subways would probably not discourage him.

*Larrabee*: I like to think that the exhilaration that he got from walking down Broadway would still come to him.

*Bryson*: Can't you imagine him going forward in a subway train to the cab, if he could, with the man who's driving it and feeling the same thrill that he used to feel when he climbed up on the box inside the driver of a horse-bus?

*Larrabee*: Almost.

*Bryson*: Little boys want to do that, and there was an awful lot of the little boy in Whitman—that's one of the best things in him.

*Larrabee*: I'd like to think, too, that if he had been born fifty years later he would have been a Sandburg, he would have been able to glory in industrialism. But I'm not absolutely confident of this. I think it does Whitman little justice to try too hard to force him into this imaginary position. As he says so often of himself, he is of his time and place.

*Manning*: Well, of course, we're tackling the problem of what happens to the human chemistry under any change of circumstances. We can't truly imagine what Whitman would have been like in the present-day scene.

*Bryson*: Mr. Manning, he used the word "vistas." "Vistas" are something you look out upon, look forward to; it's his own word. He chooses to say "I'm talking about the future"—he can't escape.

*Manning*: He really was thinking about something almost concrete in his mind, something he had expected to see by then. Therefore, it's not as much a projection, I believe, as the word "vistas" implies.

*Larrabee*: And he doesn't specifically mean that a prophet is a man who prophesies. To him a prophet is a man who summons up out

of himself the good side of the dream to set against this disappointment that surrounds him.

*Bryson*: I don't mean, again, to be unjust to Whitman. As I said, this is a great man wrestling with tremendous ideas and he can't go beyond himself, he can't go beyond his own time. I think it's fairer to say that his way of seeing everything in personal terms is one of his limitations. I'm not sure that he ever understood what you yourself have called the "policy" side of making a great country. There was very little of the statesman in him; he didn't see the function of institutions, he only saw the function of the people.

*Larrabee*: Yes, I think it must be a limitation, though I sometimes feel it's a limitation in us—the way in which we are vulnerable and accessible to the front page of the *New York Times* every morning and have to worry ourselves about making an institution or a set of political decisions do what we want them to do. This certainly didn't trouble Whitman. And I envy him that freedom.

*Manning*: At the same time, perhaps that's one of the handles that we need for *Democratic Vistas* and that he didn't provide—some sense of who was governing then, who was to blame for these things.

*Bryson*: Oh, he didn't want to fix the blame on persons.

*Larrabee*: He didn't want to fix it on persons nor on segments of society nor on anyone. He was, in effect, blaming everyone, which, for purposes of communication, is to blame no one.

*Bryson*: Do we understand ourselves better in the way that he wanted us to? We've talked about a partial realization of his dream; he wanted us to understand ourselves—do we?

*Manning*: I would hesitate to say very emphatically that we understand ourselves any better.

*Bryson*: You don't think we've made great progress in that sense?

*Manning*: I would like to think so, but I hesitate.

*Larrabee*: I would hesitate a little on the other side. I think we do. I think we certainly understand ourselves a little better for what Whitman himself has done. I certainly think that as a poet he more than fulfilled the role which he himself cast for the poet. He didn't succeed in bringing about the immediate revolution in morals and manners that he wanted. But when he is writing about what he wants the poet to do, you sense that there is Whitman himself. There's certainly no one else who comes close to filling the role.

*Manning*: I'm not sure that we can really say, with certainty, any more about our character and the flaws in it and what we're trying to do with it than Whitman could or the people in his time could.

*Larrabee*: No, I agree, and that's exactly the point at which I felt vulnerable to your earlier question. I think we do understand a little better than he did how society works. We have a somewhat better chance of succeeding when we set out to be reformers. Perhaps, in a way, we understand a little better what the goal is. We have seen more of the things that Whitman dreamed of. We have equally seen the dreams shatter and fall, as he saw them fall. But I can't help feeling that Whitman was unlucky, in a way, in not having around him enough images of what it was he was talking about. Part of the

vacuousness of his use of words is that the time and the place didn't provide him with anything better to use.

*Manning*: And partly because that was his bent too. To read Whitman is a little bit like being let loose in a rapids in a kayak—particularly his prose, and that's of course what this is. Well, I'm not as bearish as I may sound. I think we certainly have more of a grasp of how to create the society we want to live in or of how to manipulate it.

*Larrabee*: The part of the book that appeals to me is his recognition, toward the end, that to achieve this kind of America is not going to be easy.

*Bryson*: Not going to be easy. And also—since I have seemed to be, as you say, a little unjust to Whitman—we have to remember that a very great poet and a great spirit like this had nothing in the way of cheap optimism. Whitman said a great poet must also be a poet of death, because man lives in a world of peril and adventure, as well as in a world of great hope.

## NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI

### *Discourses*

(As broadcast June 24, 1956)

J. K. FEIBLEMAN • ANDRE MICHALOPOULOS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: Someone once said of Machiavelli that no one else had ever had such a tremendous career on such a small literary output, meaning, of course, *The Prince*—the one book everybody knows him for. But in a way *The Prince* was only a sort of private memorandum developed out of this much more ambitious book which he regarded as his masterpiece, his *Discourses on the History of Rome by Livy*.

*Feibleman*: The *Discourses* is a book about political theory, written and published in the early sixteenth century. It is really, I suppose, one of the first great works on modern political theory—and a tremendous contribution, too.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, it is quite a contribution. I do find it rather a rambling book; it's a long book—too long. If such a book were submitted to a publisher today, I think he would tell the author to take it back and cut it down.

*Bryson*: But how much of that is because since 1512 or '13—whenever this book was actually written—we've learned a lot? After all, in four hundred years we should know more about political history.

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, undoubtedly; also, in those days there were very few books around so that people had time to read long ones. But it is a rambling book.

*Bryson*: Do you find modern treatises on political science brief, concise, and always to the point?

*Feibleman*: It's a common sin of this type of writing. But Machiavelli did write pretty spare prose and he invented, I suppose, the Italian language so far as it concerns didactic questions and the didactic treatment of them.

*Bryson*: Most judges of Italian—which I don't pretend to be—say that he was the first really great prose writer in Italian.

*Michalopoulos*: Even in translation his style is good. But there's a sort of see-saw motion, the ideas come and go. You don't feel that he had a definite end in view. There may be a purpose—the unification of Italy was, of course, Machiavelli's great dream and that was a worthy dream—but he shifts back and forth between dictatorship and democracy, which he rather apologetically puts forward.

*Feibleman*: He was more interested, I think, in the welfare of Italy than he was in any particular form of government; he wasn't a passionate democrat. If anything, I think he was a passionate monarchist.

*Bryson*: Yet he was very proud of the fact that Florence, his own state, was one of the few republics in the world.

*Feibleman*: Yes, but he didn't want it limited to that. He had two kinds of patriotism, I think: one was Florentine, his own city, and the other was Italian. He wanted to drive the French out of Italy and unify it in the way in which France and Spain had already become unified before his day.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, but I don't think he was a monarchist. Rather, I think he had good respect for central power. After all, Rome wasn't a monarchy—and he's a great admirer of Rome. He thinks the Romans evolved a system which was the greatest of all time.

*Bryson*: Not to be too Machiavellian myself, if he wasn't a monarchist it may have been because he thought that in a republican state you could have a dictator who was more powerful than any monarch would dare to be. For *good* purposes, and I would insist good even in our sense, he thought that you had to have absolute power.

*Feibleman*: He was interested in power for the ruler and in security for the masses. Security for the masses also meant to him the preservation of their individual dignities, and I think he was in that sense a democrat. He was a monarchist in the sense that he wanted power for the ruler, but he wanted that power in order to unify society and to spread its benefits.

*Bryson*: Machiavelli, born in 1469, comes just at the time when Italy, which has so often been in that state, was torn by civil wars of the most extraordinary ferocity. He thought you could never make a great country out of a group of tiny warring cities and provinces, and he was right.

*Feibleman*: Well, there were five city states: there was Naples, Milan, Florence, Venice . . .

*Bryson*: There was also the Papacy. And then foreign invaders were always coming in to take advantage of the conflicts among these smaller states.

*Feibleman*: There were a lot of powers who had an interest, I think, in keeping Italy divided. But he wanted to unify it for patriotic purposes, and his models were ancient Rome and modern France and Spain.

*Bryson*: So the *Discourses on Livy*, the ancient Roman historian, are actually his attempt to go back into history and show his contemporaries that if they used the right method Italy might again become a great country as it was the days of Rome. I think we forget that to a man like Machiavelli Rome was an ancestral state.

*Feibleman*: That's right. It had a history of the sort he wanted to repeat.

*Michalopoulos*: And this love of unity and order—because to him I suppose Rome represented supreme order—led him to his greatest political mistake, which was throwing all his support to Cesare Borgia. He thought Cesare Borgia was going to unify Italy, and didn't realize that in that ruthless and ferocious man there was no seed that could grow into a permanent plant.

*Bryson*: Isn't that the other aspect of his personal difficulty? He not only lived in an Italy which was torn with corruption and faction, but also, after the end of his brief career as a bureaucrat, he himself was frustrated and was trying to figure out some way to get back in active politics again.

*Feibleman*: I think, if you look at the history of great men, that they rarely succeed because the ground is painted in front of them; they succeed because they've turned some kind of deficiency into a virtue or because failure in one direction has led them to success in another.

*Michalopoulos*: I find that he is a man who has made a lot of mistakes while evolving theories which are not entirely consistent.

*Bryson*: But those theories, nevertheless, are very seminal—and isn't that part of the irony of the situation?

*Feibleman*: I think that the attempt to reconcile apparent conflicts is what makes him appear confused. He tried to bring together conflicting social interests in order to make a unified state. He wanted the sovereignty of the people retained, he wanted the authority of a monarch retained, he wanted the best of Roman democracy, and he also wanted the best of a dictatorship—because that was the only way in which he thought you could bring together as many diverse city-states and as many diverse class interests as Italy was maintaining at the time.

*Bryson*: Let me ask you what I think is a crucial question: did Machiavelli think that after a dictatorship had unified Italy, it could then become a democratic state?

*Feibleman*: I think he had hopes in that direction, but I don't think he put the emphasis on it. I think the emphasis was really on step one: to get it together.

*Michalopoulos*: Machiavelli says in this book that "it's wonder-

ful to think of the greatness which Athens attained within the space of a hundred years after having freed herself from the tyranny of Pisistratus, and still more wonderful is it to reflect upon the greatness of Rome after she was rid of her kings. The cause of this is manifest, for it is not individual prosperity but the general good that makes cities great, and certainly the general good is regarded nowhere but in republics."

*Feibleman*: But the "general good" seems to me to be exemplified in this case by a particular class. Don't forget that he was against the nobility although he was for the monarchy, he was against the clergy, he was against mercenary troops; he saw society in terms of the success of the trading class, which is what today we would call business. He thought business could save Italy with a strong central government and a popular army.

*Michalopoulos*: In that he takes the same position as the early English kings who were the allies of the people against the barons. In fact, he defines the medieval nobles, whom he calls "gentlemen," as "men who live idly upon proceeds of their extensive possessions without devoting themselves to agriculture or any other useful pursuit to gain living. Such men are pernicious to any country or republic, the more so if they have castles which they command and subjects who obey them." And he says the only remedy for that is monarchical government, I suppose because republican government was out of the question.

*Bryson*: Yes, in his time. I don't think you can leave out the fact that he was constantly, in this book, comparing the corruption and inefficiency and ineffectiveness of his fellow Italians with the greatness of character of the Romans.

*Feibleman*: The curious thing is that he really was one of the instruments for bringing the Middle Ages to an end and initiating the modern world, without being aware altogether of the forces in the modern world. For instance, he didn't anticipate Protestantism, although he saw the corruption in the Church. But he saw that certain forms which the Middle Ages had promoted had to be brought to an end if this movement to unify Italy was to take effect.

*Michalopoulos*: You give him a rather purposive approach, Mr. Feibleman. You say that he saw this. I don't know that he did; I think that he rambles along and makes statements and is writing in a reflective sort of way. I wonder if he's aiming at anything?

*Feibleman*: Well, he said he always had the natural desire to work for the common benefit of all, and I assume he meant that—although certainly as an active politician this may not have been so evident.

*Bryson*: I think we're under the shadow of his reputation. He was, of course, condemned by the Counter-Reformation . . .

*Michalopoulos*: And of course the Church supported him in his own time. The Church was behind Cesare Borgia and he was for Cesare Borgia.

*Bryson*: But that was more personal than it was institutional. I



think we are overshadowed by the fact that the book of Machiavelli which everyone has read is that private memorandum to Cesare Borgia, *The Prince*, which he didn't expect ever to be published. That little handbook telling a ruler how to deceive the people for their own good, how to assassinate his enemies, has given birth to the term "Machiavellian." He never thought anybody was going to read that; this book, the *Discourses*, is what he expected people to read.

*Michalopoulos*: The little one, *The Prince*, is beautifully written; it's compact, it comes to the point, and you enjoy it, whether you approve of it or not. But this one rambles along.

*Feibleman*: The *Discourses* is really not like *The Prince*. It's a pretty dispassionate and detached treatise on human behavior as an observational study. Machiavelli's being called immoral, or even amoral, is a result of the fact that he wasn't concerned in that context with morality one way or another, but with observing the way people behave and in drawing conclusions from this. It's a study of institutions as such; the state as an institution is really the theme of this book.

*Bryson*: It's all exactly as if some young man, some idealistic young professor of political science—rather, some young man interested in political science—goes into politics and at forty-three finds himself out of favor forever. He writes a long and scholarly work telling what politics is all about, and then on the side he thinks he'll write a little private memorandum to some political boss: "Look, this is what you're doing, although you don't know it; let me tell you how to do it a little better." He does it in the hope that the political boss, in the long run, will bring about the good of his country. Now, that's his basic mistake, isn't it? He thinks the end justifies the means.

*Feibleman*: I think you're underestimating him. He's not just a failure politically. We have an awful lot of political failures who don't write books like the *Discourses*.

*Bryson*: I meant that in politics he was a failure. And are you, as a philosopher, telling me that a failed politician can become a great political theorist just perhaps because he has the temperament to be a politician?

*Feibleman*: No, I think it happens more positively than that. I think what happens in a case like Machiavelli's is that you have a man of great ability. He has ability in two directions, which is rare. He has action-ability and he has theory-ability. He puts the action-ability into practice and gets, as Machiavelli did, quite far. Then he fails and turns to his other recourse. We don't know from a contemporary point of view which of Machiavelli's abilities was the most impressive, but the theoretical is the one that makes the longest impression on us, certainly.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, so far I have perhaps appeared as the one who least approves of this . . .

*Bryson*: You're bored by him, Mr. Michalopoulos.

*Michalopoulos*: Not quite. But let me now change my own position a bit.

*Bryson*: We're not forgetting, Mr. Michalopoulos, that you've had far more political experience than either Mr. Feibleman or I. Haven't you met some Machiavellian statesmen in your life?

*Michalopoulos*: I've met some very great statesmen in my life.

*Bryson*: Isn't that the same thing?

*Michalopoulos*: Perhaps! Very great statesmen who know the value of pragmatic considerations . . . but here I would like to point to something which is quite interesting, wherein Machiavelli tells us that the way to build a great state is to do exactly what the United States has done. He says: "Those who desire a city [which means a state, of course, in his time] to achieve great empire must endeavor to make her populous by attracting strangers [immigration] or [well, this is not the United States] by destroying neighboring cities and compelling the inhabitants to come and dwell in yours."

*Bryson*: How about the Indians?

*Michalopoulos*: The Indians?

*Bryson*: Didn't we destroy the Indians because they were our neighbors and we didn't want them? I'm not so sure that we weren't Machiavellian all the way. But go ahead!

*Michalopoulos*: Anyway, he goes on to say that Lycurgus in Sparta was wrong in prohibiting the admixture of the Spartans with foreign populations. He says there are three ways of achieving and increasing greatness. The first is the Tuscan method of confederation (the Swiss method, really). The second is the Roman method of conquering neighboring states and then admitting them into the great society. He says that is the best because the central part retains direction. And the third is the Athenian method of empire through subjection, as he calls it. Well, of course, the Athenians started out with empire through association and then shifted to empire through subjection.

*Bryson*: And what way did we take—the middle one, the Roman one?

*Michalopoulos*: The Swiss one, I think—confederation.

*Feibleman*: I would like to return, just for a moment, to a point Mr. Bryson made which we haven't picked up yet, and I think it's an important one: that the ends justify the means. It's true that Machiavelli did say this and he said it in the *Discourses*, but he also said something else in the *Discourses* which seems to me to make a quite different point of this. He says: "Don't ever preserve evil out of respect for the good that you have wanted to preserve." When you play with evil forces you're running some considerable risks. His view was that you have to point out the limits of evil in order to achieve the good. The moral art, so to speak, is founded on a study of amoral forces and also of evil forces. You have to find out the way things are if you want to work toward the way they ought to be.

*Bryson*: That's why you call him a great political scientist?

*Feibleman*: Yes. I think he's a very acute observer of the evil forces with which we have to deal if we're going to arrive at the good state, and it was the good state, I think, that he was after.

*Michalopoulos*: I agree entirely with that. But then he takes a position that you must be absolutely ruthless in extirpating the evil. Instead of trying to cure it by gentler remedies, he says you must have a prince who is going to cut it all out—who is going to be savage and massacre everybody. That's rather the attitude he takes, but whether that is good political science in terms of the modern world, I don't know. It seems to me somewhat dictatorial.

*Bryson*: There are good judges who say such ruthlessness has always failed. In the actual unification of Italy, which Machiavelli so passionately desired, and which didn't take place until the nineteenth century, I should say that Cavour, who was the political manager of it, was Machiavellian to the hilt.

*Feibleman*: I think you're quite right in your contention that Machiavelli was ruthless and advised ruthless methods in achieving political dictatorship, but he also said: "Your state is no stronger than the troops on which you rely."

*Michalopoulos*: That's why I say that the man isn't consistent.

*Feibleman*: Yes, but the troops?

*Michalopoulos*: The troops are power.

*Feibleman*: The troops are power, but the sovereignty of the people is necessary to attain the fidelity of the troops.

*Bryson*: The troops must be native troops. Their own people, not mercenaries.

*Feibleman*: And you're going to have to sell them on the fact that you're running the state for their welfare, if you're going to retain their loyalty up to the point where they're willing to sacrifice themselves in an army. That's what he says.

*Michalopoulos*: That is again the practical consideration. I mean, that's practical politics. It's not because of any particular love for the citizens of his own country; it is because he doesn't believe that foreign troops can be depended upon.

*Feibleman*: Could I perhaps reconcile the contradiction we all seem to see in Machiavelli by calling him a pragmatist?

*Bryson*: You do that at your peril as a philosopher, Mr. Feibleman. You may have a lot of them down your neck.

*Feibleman*: Well, I have anyhow. It seems to me that he was interested in showing that what works as good for the state is itself good—if you can make it work. In other words, he was after good ends but he was willing to use dubious means.

*Bryson*: Is that pragmatism?

*Feibleman*: Well, I'm offering "what works is true" as a definition of the James and Dewey sort of pragmatism; I don't think it would do for Peirce's pragmatism—Peirce thought that what is true will work in the long run, and that's a different story.

*Michalopoulos*: Anyhow, who of us is always consistent?

*Bryson*: None of us, of course, and particularly the practical man in politics. Here's a pioneer in political science, and the pioneer always seems to be struggling with inconsistencies because he comes at a time when it's too early to see that all the great operations are compromises.

Not only in politics but in everything else. The great politician is the man who knows how far you can compromise with evil without losing the ultimate good, isn't he?

*Feibleman*: I think so. I think it's possible to say without too much condemnation that every politician has a bit of Machiavelli in him.

*Bryson*: Or he doesn't stay in office?

*Feibleman*: Or he doesn't achieve office. But that doesn't mean that every politician is entirely composed of what we call a "Machiavellian" element, and I don't think Machiavelli was either.

*Michalopoulos*: To come to another point, would you ever have imagined that there was common ground on which both Machiavelli and Jefferson stood?

*Bryson*: Not the Jefferson that we're taught about in school. You might if you read Jefferson's own stuff—which nobody ever does, Mr. Michalopoulos, except you.

*Michalopoulos*: I have a little thing here which struck me as very funny. Machiavelli says about the corruption of cities: "If one wanted to establish a republic at the present time, he would find it much easier with the simple mountaineers than with such as are accustomed to live in cities where civilization is already corrupt."

*Bryson*: This is Machiavelli?

*Michalopoulos*: That's Machiavelli! And Jefferson says: "The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government as sores do to the strength of the human body. I think our governments will remain virtuous for many centuries as long as they are chiefly agricultural, and this will be as long as there are vacant lands in America. When they get piled on one another in large cities, as in Europe, they will become as corrupt as in Europe."

*Bryson*: Mr. Jefferson was obviously wrong, because the Democratic Party—which is his own creation, according to the Democrats—is almost entirely a party of the urban proletariat, isn't it? Not almost entirely, but basically so. I'm using "proletariat" here in the pre-Marxian sense.

*Feibleman*: Also, we have a curious situation, in present-day America. We have these huge cities, but we also have wide-open unpopulated spaces. That's an odd contradiction.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, I have the greatest admiration for Jefferson. I think he's the greatest modern statesman, bar none, but he certainly did make a rather strange prediction there. He obviously thought that America would never develop great cities because it wouldn't have the need to.

*Bryson*: And Machiavelli saw something which in his time would have been true but which in modern times, with modern technologies, is no longer true.

*Feibleman*: He saw a constancy in human nature. I'm not sure there is a constancy in human nature, but he thought there was. I think his big point, if you can make a big point out of this particular book, is that society will not serve men at all unless men are willing to serve society. There's a reciprocal operation at work and you must

have both elements. I don't think he was interested so much in facts as he was with strategy, but you must know the facts in order to develop the strategy. The means he was using, and was willing to see others use, were a pretty questionable business. Nevertheless, the end he had in mind was the welfare of society as a whole, and so the whole picture, really, is a good picture with a good purpose.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, I think the central theme of all of Machiavelli's work is power. I don't know that he *worshipped* power, but he saw that power had to be at the center of human affairs.

*Bryson*: He seems never to have thought of a sentence which has become famous since his time: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

[JULY-SEPTEMBER 1956 • STRANGE LANDSCAPES]

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

### *The Tempest*

(As broadcast July 1, 1956)

WALTER COHEN • MAURICE DOLBIER • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: I suppose one might say that all of Shakespeare's landscapes are "strange"; the force of imagination that inspires his characters, the intensity with which people live in all of his plays, makes their surroundings seem a little strange to the ordinary imagination.

*Cohen*: But *The Tempest* has an obvious geographic strangeness as well, and probably Shakespeare chose it deliberately in furtherance of certain aims that he had. It seems likely that this play was written for a wedding . . .

*Bryson*: As a kind of masque?

*Cohen*: Actually a masque. He introduces the elements of another world—the fairy world that we find in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for instance, which also was written for a wedding.

*Dolbier*: You are suggesting, then, that this was specifically written for an occasion rather than as just another stage work?

*Cohen*: I imagine that it was. Wouldn't you think so—from the continuous references to the marriage, from the fact that a large part of the action is concerned with Ferdinand's wooing of Miranda?

*Dolbier*: Of course, the suggestion has been made that it was first written as a stage work and that Shakespeare later revised it into a masque.

*Bryson*: Well, almost every possible suggestion that the imagination of lesser men could think up has been made about this play.

*Cohen*: Yes, that's one of the extraordinary things about *The Tempest*. In its outlines it is a simple story of a tragedy that took place

years ago and now, in the present day, is resolved by reconciliation and general forgiveness. But it admits of all these deeper meanings that people have found in it through the years. For instance, it's not only geographical distance in the play that Shakespeare is concerned with; distance provides more than exotic scenery. It puts the characters at a necessary remove from the original scene so they can achieve reconciliation with each other, forgiveness, understanding.

*Bryson*: Part of this, of course, is related to the often-repeated statement that this play, perhaps more than any other, is the one that Shakespeare wrote according to the classic unities. The action all takes place within the same length of time that is required to act the play on the stage.

*Dolbier*: Three hours.

*Bryson*: You don't wander about the landscape as you do in most Elizabethan plays. Is that partly, you think, because Shakespeare is leading up to an event? I mean, is this a kind of preparation for the great event of the wedding? After all, if it was for a wedding, it was for some very important person in James I's court.

*Cohen*: I think so. As a matter of fact, the suggestion has been made that *The Tempest* was written for the festivities that attended the wedding of James's own daughter, Elizabeth, to the Count Palatine of Bohemia. But it's true time plays a very interesting role in this play. In no other play of his does Shakespeare so definitely name the hour, the minute, on every occasion. Prospero, for instance, begins his narration to Miranda with "The hour's now come; the very minute bids thee ope thine ear." It seems to me as though Shakespeare and the members of the cast were saying to the audience: "We know you are all gathered for a wedding and that you're eager for the festivities to begin. We'll get to them: we have our eye on the clock as well as you."

*Bryson*: With this devotion to the unities, Shakespeare was under the necessity—as the classical dramatists were—of having most of the events take place off stage and presenting only the climax. And the climax is here, as in the old days, the reversal of fortune. He starts out with the wise, magical old gentleman on the island with his beautiful daughter, who's never seen, I think, but two men. Is that right?

*Cohen*: Yes. There's more than an indication of past events, there's more than a messenger's mere narration of them. There is in some ways a *duplication* of the past. It was originally a tempest, a moral tempest, that drove Prospero, the Duke of Milan, from his throne. The wickedness of his brother Antonio, who plotted to dethrone Prospero, is the original tempest—the cause of all the action.

*Bryson*: Because Prospero was a bit neglectful. He was reading too many books.

*Cohen*: Yes, the fault originally was Prospero's too. He neglected his proper duties. And that again brings in a theme which is very important to Shakespeare and occurs in many of the plays—that stability in life depends on everyone's observing his proper degree in it. If Prospero was a duke, he should have acted as a duke.

*Dolbier:* You have mentioned it as being specifically written for a wedding, and it is true that the masque elements enter into it. I think, however, that the subject that you have just brought up, the problem of good government, is central to the play. And that, too, would have been of extreme interest at court.

*Bryson:* Was he talking to James I?

*Dolbier:* I think he was talking to James, and to the chartered companies who were starting to colonize the new world.

*Bryson:* Yes, it could be any one of the islands to which the British adventurers were going every day to start new kingdoms of their own—not to practice magic as Prospero did, but to do something very strange and wonderful just the same.

*Cohen:* Of course, that's another sense in which the "strange landscape" of this play would have an interest for the audience of its time. Mariners were coming back from the western world, bringing their stories of exotic creatures found and new lands discovered, and the whole audience would be on tiptoe to hear something about them from a current playwright.

*Dolbier:* I can't say now whether Webster's *Westward Ho* came before this or at about the same period, but Shakespeare's treatment of the theme went beyond strange landscapes and exciting events and weird and wonderful spirits and devils to be found; this play operates on a philosophical level which the popular playwrights left alone.

*Cohen:* The geographical landscape is strange in its aspect but not too remote in its geography. It is often suggested that the action takes place on Bermuda. Well, of course it doesn't. The action takes place on an island which is only two days from Naples and in the Mediterranean, as a matter of fact.

*Dolbier:* The spirit, Ariel, is sent to the Bermudas and it's a fairly long trip.

*Bryson:* To go back to these philosophical meanings: I think it's very important to remember the structure that Shakespeare has given the play. The old man who neglected his duties as Duke of Naples gets shipwrecked and put on this island through the conspiracy of his brother, who wants him dead. He's there with his daughter Miranda . . .

*Cohen:* "All tears and wonder."

*Bryson:* Yes, and she has never seen but two men, her father and Caliban, this strange half-animal, half-man that Prospero manages by his magic arts. By the way, is it at all indicated at any point in the play how the duke became a magician? Was he studying magic when he was neglecting his ducal duties, or did he take this book with him and decide after he got there that by magic arts he could regain his kingdom?

*Cohen:* I should think that, for an Elizabethan audience, any deep study that would remove a man from his everyday affairs would almost naturally suggest studies in magic. And, don't forget, Prospero was also an astrologer. He has raised the storm at this very minute

because his stars are in the ascendant; if he takes advantage of it now he will flow on to fortune.

*Bryson:* The play opens with this wonderful storm scene, not with Prospero himself. He is behind scenes bringing the storm down upon a miscellany of characters which include his faithless brother and Alonso—who never understood quite what happened, being a king. Prospero causes the storm and the shipwreck in order to bring these people under his power.

*Cohen:* Interestingly, we do not know that they are under his power at first. I think perhaps Shakespeare may have had a reason for doing that. Had we seen them merely as creatures of Prospero's storm-magic they would not have acted as independent characters. But being unaware of Prospero for the moment, we see them as they actually are—and they declare the themes that are developed throughout the remainder of the play. In that first scene aboard the storm-tossed ship, Gonzalo says of the boatswain: "I have great comfort from this fellow: me thinks he hath no drowning mark upon him; his complexion is perfect gallows. Stand fast, good Fate, to his hanging; make the rope of his destiny for our cable, for our own doth little advantage. If he be not born to be hanged, our case is miserable." Clearly, the boatswain was born to be hanged. And there, I think, Shakespeare is foreshadowing the idea that character is destiny. It is an idea that you find developed later in the play—the destinies of all the people in it, the ends they come to, are all conditioned by their original characters. On their first appearance on the island, despite the horrors of the storm, they all behave very much as they would have behaved at court. Sebastian, the king's brother, and Antonio, the usurping duke, are at their plots again almost as soon as they have been miraculously saved.

*Dolbier:* Yes, and Ferdinand strikes us as merely a beautiful decoration in a book.

*Bryson:* Well, he is a beautiful decoration until he sees Miranda. She thinks he's the most beautiful young man in the world because she had never seen any other. But he's just a decoration until he sees Miranda, and then he suddenly becomes a human being because he falls in love with this creature who is "all tears and wonder."

*Dolbier:* His first thought, when he sees Miranda, is that this fair creature must be the goddess of the island. He addresses her precisely as figure in a chivalrous tale would and asks her to instruct him how to behave. Behavior was very important to him, as it probably was to all Elizabethans and to members of any court circle then.

*Bryson:* This business of having each character behave as he would in the court is one of Shakespeare's devices and it's an extraordinarily clever one, if you can use "clever" in regard to Shakespeare. There is a lot of necessary exposition at the beginning. He manages it with that long scene, before the people come from the shipwreck, in which Prospero tries to explain to Miranda that she is the daughter of a duke and that they're on this island because he was betrayed by his brother. He keeps saying to her: "I pray thee, mark me . . . dost thou hear? . . . Hear a little further."

*Cohen:* Yes, that "listen to me" is an interesting point. You



know that *The Tempest* is one of the cornerstones of those who believe in the Baconian authorship of Shakespeare . . .

*Bryson*: Of which I take it you are not one?

*Cohen*: Well, I'm indifferent to it.

*Bryson*: You don't care?

*Cohen*: No theories about Shakespeare interest me.

*Bryson*: You would just as soon have had Shakespeare write Bacon's essays as vice versa?

*Cohen*: Yes. Although, of course, I often wonder at the foolishness of people who imagine that anybody who could have written as Shakespeare wrote should ever have bothered to write in any other way. Why in the world would a man write Bacon's essays if he could write Shakespeare's plays? But at least this play is used as evidence by the Baconians, who regard as very important Prospero's saying: "Listen to me . . . mark me . . . be attentive" and so on. There's Bacon, they say, warning us to listen to his evidence; but, actually, I think that Shakespeare was doing no more than keeping the audience alert, listening to a long story.

*Dolbier*: I think that's a very refreshing suggestion—treating Shakespeare as a playwright who knew his business.

*Cohen*: Well, obviously he did.

*Bryson*: He did, although I think perhaps a little less in this play than most. It's not one of his greatest plays, as a play, and yet you can't help admiring the extraordinary skill with which he tells you so much of the story in retrospect.

*Cohen*: It's extraordinary! I think we don't realize, unless we stop to count them, that in that opening scene there are no more than sixty-seven lines; and yet, in them every man declares precisely what his past history was and what his future will be. Gonzalo is still the kind-hearted, honest old man. Alonso, the King of Naples, who has the elements of good in him and finally achieves repentance and forgiveness, falls to his prayers with Ferdinand, his son. But Antonio, the usurping brother, and Sebastian, the man who has helped him, are capable of nothing but curses and anger.

*Dolbier*: Yes. In certain allegorical interpretations of the play, by the way, Ferdinand is taken to be Fletcher, the poet, to whom Shakespeare was here handing on the elements of his art.

*Bryson*: What about allegory? Is it worth talking about? Is Shakespeare really telling you two stories here—one a fairy tale, in a strange landscape, of a man who got back his kingdom by the use of magic after it had been usurped by his brother? Is he just telling you a pleasant tale, which has, of course, its philosophic meanings, or does each of these people stand for somebody else?

*Cohen*: Of course, no play has more often been subjected to allegorical interpretation. I think a reason for that is the one you suggested, that there's a certain theatrical weakness in it. The characters are not insistent and forceful in their reality. They don't have the utter conviction that those of *Macbeth* or *Othello* do, for instance, and so they open the way to allegorical interpretation.

*Dolbier*: It seems to me that some of the dullest scenes in the

play are those devoted to the people of the court and that some of the most interesting ones are those that have been called dull—the extremely long second act, for example, in which I think there are three separate expositions of the play. You said earlier, Mr. Bryson, that this is a play about reversals of fortune.

*Bryson:* Well, in the classic sense.

*Dolbier:* It seems that the reversals of fortune occurred before this play started; once the curtain is up, fortune, as such, is not reversed. I mean that it's a personal, an individual, action of Prospero's that brings about the change.

*Bryson:* It isn't like the Greek plays in that fortune overturns; rather, it is the action of a man who realizes that perhaps he made a mistake to be a duke, and paid too much attention to his library and not enough to his council chamber. When at the end he says "our revels now are ended," perhaps he meant, "Well, we've had enough of this nonsense—I'm going to go back and be a good duke."

*Cohen:* One of the great qualities of the play is that there is no sudden, accidental reversal of fortune.

*Bryson:* It isn't accidental at all. Prospero makes it happen.

*Cohen:* Yes, that reversal is a process which represents the development of the characters who were involved in the original action.

*Dolbier:* There is one sudden conversion—when Prospero is turned from his ideas of vengeance by Ariel's words, "if you now beheld them, your affections would become tender."

*Bryson:* If a fairy spirit can forgive, why shouldn't man forgive?

*Cohen:* "They being penitent," Prospero says, "The sole drift of my purpose doth extend not a frown further." But I don't think that Ariel has quite that decisive an effect on Prospero. I think Prospero knows pretty well in advance what his action will be. Ariel is scarcely a character in the play at all, is he?

*Bryson:* Ariel is only a voice.

*Cohen:* He's a figure of the mind, and not only of Prospero's mind. It's very interesting, by the way, that he is never summoned. Prospero thinks of him and he is there. He comes on a thought. But he's not a figure of Prospero's mind alone: he's a figure of the mind of anyone who can be touched by certain forces of renovation. For instance, in the third act, Ariel appears to the three people chiefly concerned in the original conspiracy—Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian—and delivers his great and wonderful speech, a very massive, powerful sort of hieratic speech which recalls the music of Mozart in *The Magic Flute*—Sarasro's music, for instance. When he does that, he actually doesn't speak to them; Alonso gathers the import of what he says from the waves, from the winds, from the accidents that have befallen him. *We* hear what Ariel says; Alonso doesn't, but is merely touched by it.

*Dolbier:* We have not mentioned yet one of the most important characters in the play—the savage, deformed slave Caliban.

*Bryson:* We've mentioned him, but we haven't done him justice. What do you make of Caliban?

*Dolbier:* I find him one of Shakespeare's most interesting char-

acters. He is certainly nothing from the happy fairy world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He is hardly a fairy at all. He's a form of man, or man perhaps in his natural state, before grace. Of course, Caliban gives an indication that he is reaching for grace, that he sees his mistake in thinking of the drunken butler and the other stupid servant with whom he conspired as leaders.

*Cohen*: He was cannibal; he was cannibal transformed into the proper name Caliban.

*Bryson*: Going back to your point about the time at which this play was produced: people were fascinated by the strange natives of all these new places that were being discovered—Caliban is a Cherokee Indian; he's a South Sea Islander; he's somebody in Africa.

*Dolbier*: He's the white man's burden.

*Bryson*: That's right. He was the white man's burden, and a very heavy one.

*Cohen*: And I should certainly agree with Mr. Dolbier that he is one of the most interesting characters in the play.

*Bryson*: At the end, when Prospero has sort of tied up all the knots, do you think Caliban is going to be made into a human being?

*Cohen*: Caliban all along has given us hints. But *will* he be made into a human being? I don't know.

*Dolbier*: He'll be at least as human as some of the people at the court.

*Cohen*: I am not sure that to be made into a human being would be necessarily a step in his progress, considering some of the human beings who *are* on display here. But Caliban throughout the play has given us hints that he has the possibilities of redemption and achievement in him. He's sensitive to music; he dreams of it; it moves him to tears.

*Bryson*: He's the original savage breast that music soothed.

*Cohen*: Yes. And he has the instincts of a gentleman, in that his first thought when anyone approaches him in friendliness and kindness is to make a quick response to them: what can he give them? After all, he has shown Prospero all of the springs on the island, he has shown him where to trap the edible animals, and things of that sort.

*Bryson*: Yes, under considerable pressure from Prospero.

*Cohen*: Not necessarily. His first gesture towards Stephano, whom he takes for a god, is to offer to show him the best springs, pluck him the best berries, and serve him. And at the end he speaks of his seeking for grace.

*Dolbier*: He could be used as an argument by the anticolonialists—and perhaps has been—as a type much misused.

*Bryson*: Although I think Caliban was much misused, I have to confess that this saving humanity in him is a little dimmer to my eyes than it is to yours, evidently. But what about Miranda, this strange creature brought up without knowledge of any man or any human being, really, outside of her father? Is she real?

*Cohen*: Not deliberately so brought up, but almost inevitably in view of the circumstances.

*Bryson*: Yes, having been cast up on this remote island.

*Cohen:* She's alone on the island, and has profited by her father's instruction. I imagine she knows all sorts of things, but not the common chatter, the common knowledge of the world. She's partly an abstraction. She suggests innocence; she's youthfulness now facing the world.

*Dolbier:* I look upon her as a human being and one of Shakespeare's more delightful feminine characters.

*Cohen:* But she's thinly drawn. She's an outline rather than a full-bodied creature.

*Bryson:* But is she a part of this unreal world that Prospero is abandoning? I mean, what will happen to her when he goes back to real life and practicality?

*Dolbier:* Certainly she's not going to be the same person in Milan, to which she is returning, that she was on the island.

*Bryson:* She's going to be a woman, not a figment.

*Dolbier:* Yes, inevitably, something of her is going to be left behind, just as any one of us growing out of childhood and innocence and youthfulness leaves something behind.

*Bryson:* You gentlemen have both rejected the theory that this play is a picture of Shakespeare himself, saying "Well, I've written everything I want to; I've exercised all my magic; now I'm just going to quit and enjoy life."

*Cohen:* It seems to me that Shakespeare has given us too many themes to consider in the play. There's too much to leave us any time to go stravaiging after these other ideas.

*Dolbier:* Also, he *didn't* quit.

*Bryson:* Well, he might have intended to. It's not the first "final appearance" that didn't turn out to be final. When he says "our revels now are ended," what does he mean?

*Dolbier:* I think he's referring to the masque that has just been concluded, and I think he's written a piece of beautiful poetry about it. I don't look upon it as the theme of the play, that all life is illusion. I think that the theme of the play is that life is pretty real and pretty earnest, but it must be lived on a different plane.

*Bryson:* What about going into a strange landscape? Does that have any meaning or value to a man?

*Dolbier:* I think it had meaning for Prospero. The landscape he goes back to, the old one, is going to be changed because of the strange one in which he has been.

*Bryson:* And he also has been changed?

*Cohen:* The strange landscape is necessary to him, and it so often is to us, or to anyone, in order to achieve understanding. He must be under a strange sky; he must be at a remove from the past in order to see it differently and to be able to pass on it.

*Bryson:* And I would always think that Shakespeare was more interested in delighting and moving us than he was in telling us something about himself, because, of all the great poets, he seems to me the least self-conscious. The play is a great poem. I don't think it's a piece of autobiography.

# W. M. THACKERAY

## The Rose and the Ring

(As broadcast July 8, 1956)

B. J. CHUTE

DAN WICKENDEN

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* How did a novelist, a very great novelist, who in his own day was thought of as somewhat cynical and certainly more satirist than anything else, come to write a fairy tale?

*Chute:* I think the answer is that Thackeray was completely uncynical about children. And I think it's love of children that counts in writing a fairy tale. He wrote this first as a pantomime for children and then used it later to entertain a sick nine-year-old girl. The mother of the little girl afterwards said that Thackeray's was "the kindest and truest heart that ever beat."

*Bryson:* Kind and true heart! Of course, the little acid tricks are in the book, too. I suppose that's one of the reasons why it's so delightful as one grows older. I didn't come across it until I *thought* I was quite grown up; I really wasn't. But I never read it as a child, although I wish I had. What's the machinery of it?

*Wickenden:* In a way it defies synopsis. It's a wonderfully and marvelously complicated plot, and I don't think we ought to get too involved in it. But I think we might say that there are actually two mythical kingdoms in this book. The action shuttles between them. At the center of the book are a prince and a princess, both of whom have been disinherited. They have lost their respective thrones. In each case the throne had been taken over by a usurper.

*Bryson:* Purely conventional in all fairy tales.

*Wickenden:* Purely. This gets the story off to a wonderful start. We find out that King Valoroso has no right to his throne and Prince Giglio is just living around the palace leading an idle, empty life. It soon becomes plain that the heroine of the book, Betsinda, who is the disinherited princess, is right there on the scene in King Valoroso's palace. She has wandered in as an orphan, a stray, and has become a maid.

*Bryson:* She is the Cinderella character.

*Wickenden:* And she, when we first meet her, is a maid to Valoroso's daughter, Angelica.

*Bryson:* Now don't be deceived by the name Angelica: it doesn't mean that she is angelic.

*Wickenden:* Far from it.

*Bryson:* Is it only stupid males who don't see that she isn't quite angelic?

*Chute:* Well, she's a princess, and you look at princesses with a special eye. I think she got respectful treatment from everybody around the palace, but I think perhaps the males were a little . . .

*Bryson*: What do you think they said about Angelica below the stairs, so to speak?

*Chute*: I rather think they said she wasn't quite up to all the airs that she gave herself; she wasn't quite the complete, perfect lady that she was supposed to be. But Betsinda was rather popular downstairs, so I think that would color the picture.

*Wickenden*: At this point we ought to mention the fact that the book is called *The Rose and the Ring* because of two magical objects that play a great part in the plot. This imperishable rose makes the wearer or owner of it, if he is a man, seem incredibly handsome and attractive; if she is a woman, radiantly beautiful and irresistible to all men. The ring has the same effect.

*Bryson*: Which was the stronger of the two? When you bring two gadgets together, both of which make people completely irresistible, I can see a dramatic situation arising that I think Thackeray evaded. Suppose one person had the rose, another had the ring, and they were rivals. What would have happened?

*Wickenden*: He never makes that quite so clear as he might have. On the whole, the ring plays rather more part in the plot than the rose does. The ring has been inherited by Giglio, but having fallen in love with Angelica at a very early age, he has given it to her. It is because Angelica has been wearing the ring all these years—at least partly because of that—that everybody considers her so beautiful and so charming.

*Bryson*: Giglio himself considers her beautiful.

*Wickenden*: But Angelica's interest having shifted to Prince Bulbo, the prince from the neighboring kingdom, she has a quarrel with Giglio and flings the ring out of the window. Whereupon she immediately becomes, really, almost repellent to Giglio. He notices that she has a cast in one eye and that one leg is shorter than the other, he suspects that a good deal of her hair is false, and so on.

*Bryson*: Quite a fall! But what about Bulbo? He's almost villainous but I rather like him.

*Wickenden*: Oh, I would take issue with you! I don't think that Bulbo is ever villainous. He's a plump, rather amiable . . .

*Bryson*: Well, not villainous in the sense that he does anything vicious, but he's *not* the hero.

*Wickenden*: In my mind he's a sort of secondary, subsidiary hero, because by the end of the book we have become very fond of Bulbo. Some terrible things happen to him. Twice he is in peril of having his head chopped off; or perhaps the second time he's about to be hanged—I can't quite remember. Anyway, he cries a little bit when he knows he's going to have his head chopped off.

*Chute*: There's a wonderful line about that: "The Undertaker came and measured him for the handsomest coffin that money could buy—even this didn't console Bulbo."

*Bryson*: Let's get Bulbo into the story here.

*Wickenden*: Well, Bulbo is the son of King Padella, the usurper in Crim Tartary. The two mythical kingdoms are Paflogonia and Crim Tartary.

*Bryson*: The thrones of both are occupied by usurpers.

*Wickenden*: King Padella is the usurper of Betsinda's throne, the throne of Crim Tartary. Betsinda herself, you see, had vanished at a very early age. We subsequently discover that she wandered away into the wilderness, where she encountered a kindly lioness who reared her with her own cubs. But in any case, Bulbo is the son of King Padella and he comes to Paflagonia to woo Angelica, who has already fallen in love with a very flattering portrait of him. This is why she loses interest in Giglio. As I said, we don't want to get too involved in the complexities of this plot.

*Bryson*: It gets more and more intricate as one goes on, doesn't it?

*Wickenden*: But things reach a point where both Betsinda and Giglio have to flee from the capital city of Paflagonia because each of them is in very grave danger for one reason or another.

*Bryson*: Leaving poor Bulbo to be almost-executed twice.

*Chute*: I think part of the marvelous fairy-tale quality of this book is the *Perils of Pauline* note on which Thackeray ends each chapter. For instance, he will announce that Bulbo is about to be executed—but we must now revert to Betsinda and Giglio just when we are hanging on the edge of the scaffold. It's a craftsman's trick. It shows in every line of *The Rose and the Ring*, that wonderful craftsmanlike quality of Thackeray's. You're never let down, you're constantly on the edge. It has the quality of holding you even to the very, very last line of the book; you just don't know exactly how it's going to come out.

*Bryson*: That makes me ask you a question about what there is in this story that makes it a fairy tale; do you at any time have any doubt about the happy outcome?

*Chute*: No, never. I'm sure that nobody would.

*Bryson*: You know where you're going to arrive, but you don't know how you're going to get there?

*Chute*: But of course in a fairy tale you have the wonderful advantage of having a fairy, so that no matter how involved everything gets, you can count on magic to get you out of it. And this is a very wonderful fairy, the Fairy Blackstick, whom he describes as "one of the most active and officious of the whole College of Fairies." As her christening gift to Giglio and Betsinda she promised them both a little misfortune. And, of course, that is what they got.

*Bryson*: Thackeray isn't quite joking there, is he?

*Chute*: No, I think he's very serious. Giglio could very easily have become a very spoiled young man; it's the misfortunes he encounters that make him come out rather a solid character at the end. So I think that's a very serious little touch, it's a sort of moral maxim that he puts in every so often for children. But I think really in the back of Thackeray's mind is the feeling that a too easy life is not the best one for a child to look forward to.

*Wickenden*: He points the moral in the words of the Fairy Blackstick herself when the happy ending is almost in sight—not quite, because as you say the suspense is maintained almost to the last lines

in the book. But just before that final happy ending, the Fairy Blackstick points out to Giglio that he might not have become this sterling character if he had not had the initial series of misfortunes, and that Betsinda might have been as vain and empty and silly and spoiled as Angelica—that she is not only a beautiful girl but a good girl, and she's a good girl partly because she has had to go through a series of misfortunes and has risen to them nobly.

*Bryson:* Taking this bit of Victorian moral at its face value, should we give our children a little misfortune deliberately in order to make better characters of them?

*Wickenden:* As the parent of three very young children, I think they are bound to encounter at least minor misfortunes from the very day they are born.

*Bryson:* You don't have to arrange any?

*Wickenden:* I think they just happen.

*Bryson:* Then all children grow up moral today?

*Wickenden:* It would be nice to believe so.

*Bryson:* Well, I'm bothered a bit by these Victorian moral maxims—not that they spoil the book at all, they're part of the charm of it.

*Wickenden:* But that particular moral is probably, on the whole, a sound one.

*Bryson:* Of course it is.

*Wickenden:* A very sound one. I think that we might demur a bit at the other part of the moral, which comes at the end of the book. The magic rose and the magic ring are given back to Bulbo and Angelica, who really need them because in themselves they are not beautiful. Once he has the magic ring, Bulbo becomes at least a personable young man, and once Angelica has the rose in her permanent keeping, she becomes quite pretty again. The false hair and the short leg don't matter.

*Chute:* At least Bulbo doesn't see them.

*Wickenden:* But it turns out that Betsinda doesn't really need to wear the magic ring; she is still a very pretty girl as far as everybody is concerned, and to Giglio, who loves her, she is still as radiantly beautiful as ever.

*Bryson:* Are you rejecting the moral of that, Mr. Wickenden?

*Wickenden:* I'm not rejecting *all* the moral of it. The part about her being beautiful to Giglio because he loves her—that is surely sound. But I think we're getting a bit onto Victorian grounds when we suggest that you can become literally physically beautiful simply by being good. It would be nice if that were true . . .

*Bryson:* Now it is almost exactly a hundred years ago that this book was written and published, and it was, as Miss Chute told us in the beginning, to amuse a sick child. Are you saying that a hundred years ago you might have become beautiful if you were good, but that in today's world it doesn't matter *how* good you are, you won't be beautiful?

*Wickenden:* Not at all.



*Bryson*: You're rejecting the very basis of all fairy tales, Mr. Wickenden.

*Wickenden*: Yes, perhaps we're getting a little too solemn about a book that is not solemn in the least.

*Chute*: But don't you think it's a convention in fairy tales that there is no gray, that everything is black or white?

*Wickenden*: Oh, yes!

*Chute*: Isn't that true of this particular one?

*Wickenden*: Certainly. That's one of the reasons why this is such a good fairy tale. In the first place, it's obvious that Thackeray must have had a wonderfully good time writing it. He had lots of fun; and one of the things he was making fun of, in a kindly way, was the fairy tale itself.

*Bryson*: And yet in one sense he wrote a perfect fairy tale. It isn't a parody.

*Wickenden*: It's not remotely a parody, but there *is* this lovely tongue-in-cheek quality in it.

*Bryson*: And that doesn't spoil it for children?

*Wickenden*: I've been trying to remember how this book struck me all the times I read it when I was young. I'm sure I found it very amusing then, perhaps for different reasons.

*Bryson*: But isn't this tongue-in-cheek quality, which we always attribute to Thackeray, dangerous in writing for children?

*Chute*: No, I don't think so, because the child reads it on the child's level.

*Bryson*: He misses the irony?

*Chute*: I don't remember when I read it first—I know I was very small—but I read it with sheer delight as just a plain, lovely fairy tale with awfully funny bits, things like the unhappy king being whacked over the head with a warming pan. Then I grew up—I must have read it once every two years all through my life—and I became familiar with the landscape, so to speak; I moved into the climate of the book. I experienced the increased delight that an adult gets from a fairy tale when he's no longer a child.

*Bryson*: It seems to me that you're answering what is a fairly important question about this kind of book, Miss Chute. You're saying that a child doesn't see the irony in it, but if the book is by so great a writer as Thackeray it probably *has* ironic meanings. And one of the things that carries you back is that you see these new meanings, which were not there for you in the beginning. The book gets deeper as you know it better.

*Chute*: Isn't it possible that the test of a children's classic is that it can grow with the child?

*Bryson*: That's a fair question to ask.

*Wickenden*: This is a very interesting question about books, primarily written for children, that have survived. Why do they go on being read? What element in them makes them so intensely readable generation after generation to readers of all ages—not only to children, but to adults?

*Bryson*: What's the answer, Mr. Wickenden?

*Wickenden:* I like to think that such a book continues to live not only because it is a good book for children in itself, but because it has also succeeded in being a work of literature. Which suggests, in turn, that anything that is a good work of literature can't be categorized according to the ages to which it will appeal.

*Bryson:* But doesn't Mama read it to little Betsinda? I mean, Mother remembers how much she loved it when she was a little girl; she gets Betsinda by the scruff of the neck, if necessary, and says "Now here's a book I'm going to read to you." As a matter of fact, I'm quite sure that some children's classics—I wouldn't be so blasphemous as to name them—live on only because parents so much like to read them to children, though children squirm and don't like them a bit. When they grow up they read them to *their* children against the same helpless opposition. Not this book, however.

*Chute:* "The stars in their courses are fighting for them." That's quite proper, that's how it should be with good literature.

*Bryson:* Yes; all I'm saying is that these children's "classics" are not children's books primarily. But here's a book which, by the testimony of both of you as working novelists, is an almost perfect fairy tale.

*Chute:* I would think so.

*Bryson:* And that makes it a great work of art, because the fairy tale is a genre of art. Now what's the recipe for a perfect fairy tale, anyway?

*Chute:* Well, pure magic is the sense of a world created from the writer's imagination.

*Bryson:* A strange landscape?

*Chute:* A strange landscape—and in this case a very wonderfully strange one. Also the ability to use magic, so that when you get yourself in a tight corner you can be got out of it by supernatural means.

*Bryson:* Then there must be some gadgets.

*Chute:* There must be a lot of gadgets; in this book there's a rose and a ring, and there's a perfectly wonderful bottomless bag from which a full-course breakfast and all kinds of books and inkstands and boot-blackening equipment and everything else came out.

*Bryson:* They didn't have to be put in?

*Chute:* It was an empty bag, a lovely little black bag that was given to him by a fairy.

*Bryson:* And there must be a fairy.

*Chute:* There's a fairy named Blackstick.

*Bryson:* And the hero must do something good to the fairy.

*Wickenden:* Well, she was his fairy godmother, she was the one who began by wishing him a little misfortune.

*Bryson:* But he had to be good or she would have given him a rougher time.

*Wickenden:* Yes. She turned up in the coach, in which he was escaping, as a poor old woman. A fellow passenger was extremely rude to her and Giglio was much annoyed by this, little knowing that this poor old woman was his fairy godmother. He was most kind and courteous to her.

*Bryson*: That again is one of the ingredients of the perfect fairy tale. There is an unfortunate animal or an old person; you do that person or animal a favor, and by that you earn your reward.

*Chute*: That is one of the oldest things in fairy tales, I think, isn't it? The seventh son of the seventh son is always the one who's kind to the animal or the old man or something. It's a true fairy tale ingredient. It's basic.

*Bryson*: So it would appear that the Victorian delusion that you're beautiful if you're good is found in the oldest fairy tales in the world; the hero is always good as well as handsome, and the heroine is always good as well as beautiful.

*Wickenden*: I think perhaps in a symbolic way, getting a little solemn for the moment, that this does express a profound truth. In a fairy tale it's nice to think that beauty can also be physical beauty, but the moral remains in 1956 if we bear in mind that real beauty is something much deeper than physical beauty.

*Chute*: Also, I think, in 1956 we will all agree that if one is loved as much as Betsinda was loved by Giglio she would be beautiful to him.

*Wickenden*: Exactly.

*Bryson*: There is, of course, an attraction that all people feel for the good person. All right, what else? You can both go and make your fortunes by writing perfect fairy tales according to this recipe from now on.

*Chute*: Oh, certainly—it's so simple!

*Wickenden*: Some of the basic recurrent themes of so many fairy tales have been consciously used by Thackeray in this book. There is, of course, the double Cinderella theme, which applies in a way both to Giglio and Betsinda.

*Bryson*: Cinderello and Cinderella.

*Wickenden*: Exactly. And one of my favorite scenes echoes the Androcles and the lion theme. As I said earlier, I believe, in her early childhood Betsinda has been reared in the wilderness by a kindly lioness and has grown up with the cubs. As this complicated plot develops, we finally find poor Betsinda being cast into an arena to be devoured by lions.

*Bryson*: It seems a little far from Paflagonia to Rome.

*Wickenden*: The two lions that come bounding in are, needless to say, Betsinda's old playmates; so they do not devour her, they fawn upon her. But they're still good hearty man-eating lions and when a very disagreeable character leaps into the arena to prove that they're merely tame lions, he's gobbled up in no time at all.

*Bryson*: Yes, to the delight of all listening children I'm sure. All right, what else goes into the perfect fairy tale?

*Chute*: I don't think it's an absolute essential in a fairy tale, but I do think that in *The Rose and the Ring* a perfectly wonderful dividend is Thackeray's marvelous sense of nonsense.

*Bryson*: Just pure nonsense? Or, in modern terms, "dead pan" nonsense.

*Chute*: Exactly. Could I read you a little sample of it? The occasion is when Prince Bulbo is about to be executed . . .

*Bryson*: One of the occasions.

*Chute*: Yes, one of the occasions. Angelica is rightly anxious about the young man she has picked as her future husband; she is trying to get her father to sign a reprieve, but he is a rather slap-happy man about such things and it's hard for him to settle down to signing the reprieve. She finally discovers that all is lost, or feels that all is lost, and she falls down in a fainting fit:

*"Turn the cock of the urn upon Her Royal Highness," said the King, and the boiling water gradually revived her. His Majesty looked at his watch, compared it by the clock in the parlor, and by that of the church in the square opposite; then he wound it up; then he looked at it again. "The great question is," says he, "am I fast or am I slow? If I'm slow, we may as well go on with breakfast. If I'm fast, why—there is just the possibility of saving Prince Bulbo. It's a doosid awkward mistake, and upon my word, Hedzoff, I have the greatest mind to have you hanged too."*

Now that is complete, lovely, perfect nonsense in the best tradition. And, as I say, it's a dividend in a fairy tale, but I love fairy tales that have it.

*Wickenden*: I wonder if I might quote back at you one of my favorite passages? This comes fairly late in the book, when Giglio has actually completed a college education in a remarkably short space of time for such a completely ignorant and lazy young man. He's now become a dashing hero and is riding to the rescue of Betsinda, whose life he knows is in peril.

*Bryson*: Somebody's life is always in peril in this book.

*Wickenden*: The captain of the guard comes galloping up and demands that Giglio hand over his sword:

*"Give up my sword! Giglio give up his sword!" cried the Prince; and stepping well forward on to the balcony, the royal youth, without preparation, delivered a speech so magnificent, that no report can do justice to it. It was all in blank verse (in which, from this time, he invariably spoke, as more becoming his majestic station). It lasted for three days and three nights, during which not a single person who heard him was tired, or remarked the difference between daylight and dark; the soldiers only cheering tremendously when occasionally, once in nine hours, the Prince paused to suck an orange . . . Such were the consequences of having employed his time well at College!*

*Bryson*: One of the first filibusters, I suppose, in history.

*Chute*: Something wonderful is the way that, when sudden emotion hits them, they all go off into gorgeous flights of blank verse. There's the occasion when King Valoroso is talking to Hedzoff, his Captain of the Guards:

*"Hedzoff," he said, taking a death-warrant out of his dressing-gown pocket, "Hedzoff, good Hedzoff, seize upon the Prince. Thou'lt find him in his chamber two pair up. But now he dared, with sacrilegious hand, to strike the sacred night-cap of a king—Hedzoff, and floor me with a warming pan! Away! no more demur! the villain dies! See it be done, or else—h'm!—ha!—h'm! mind thine own eyes!"*

*Bryson:* But let me ask one more question about this recipe, of which I'm making a present to both of you.

*Wickenden:* Thank you, Mr. Bryson!

*Bryson:* Out of your own devising, does the perfect fairy tale have to have a happy ending?

*Wickenden:* I'm inclined to say yes. I think that a really good fairy tale ought to have a happy ending. One without a happy ending is disconcerting not only to the young reader but to the older reader. We need to read stories that have happy endings; we need to know that a happy ending is going to come up.

*Chute:* But perhaps the ones that don't have happy endings are closer to legends, and in the true fairy tale the fairy is there for the purpose of getting everybody out of a hole.

*Bryson:* So a great novelist can—if he loves children, as you said, Miss Chute—write a fairy tale that gives us happiness as long as we live, if we have the capacity to respond to this kind of delight.

## RABELAIS

### *Gargantua and Pantagruel*

*(As broadcast July 15, 1956)*

ROBERT J. CLEMENTS • EUGENIO C. VILLCANA • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Rabelais is, in a sense, the ancestor of the Paul Bunyans and Mike Finks and John Henrys that in our tradition of humor go in for exaggeration. But Rabelais himself has become almost a word instead of a name. One doesn't perhaps read him very much any more outside the classroom.

*Villicaña:* I think one does, Mr. Bryson, and I think one will always do it with great reward to one's self. When one opens this book, as when one opens any great book, one finds in it what I suppose you can call a mythical strain and with it a rather disturbing element. It is the style, that extraordinary combination of interplay between coarseness and moral subtlety, between learned, elaborate diction and homely, local, immediate contemporary references. The style makes it a book which, if you open it, will disturb you.

*Bryson:* Are you saying that all great books disturb you at first acquaintance? Some rather conceal their disturbance, don't they? There's a delayed explosion in some books. Here it hits you right in the face the moment you open it.

*Clements:* Well, it's not only the language that disturbs us. There's also the tremendous complexity we find in Rabelais, a man of the Middle Ages at the same time that he was a man of the Renaissance.

*Bryson:* He was born just at the end of the fifteenth century.

*Clements:* He was born two years after Columbus discovered America and Mr. Villicaña's ancestors chased the Moors out of Spain, so that he actually did look in two directions. He could be, as has been suggested, the erudite, almost overlearned pedant, which he himself sometimes scoffed at, but on the other hand he reached for the people. He wrote this book to be bought by and read by people going to the fairs, the fairs of Lyons and Frankfurt, and so he catered to their tastes.

*Bryson:* But can you call a man a pedant who has fun parading his learning, who parades it just because he knows that he's being a little outrageous? After all, outrageousness in the modern sense of the word is about the essential characteristic of Rabelais. It accounts both for his coarseness and for this parade of learning, doesn't it?

*Clements:* He knows that people will be delighted by it and perhaps not take it seriously. He could write Latin puns that the common people couldn't possibly understand, and then, in the next breath, slip in a scatological one that nobody could miss.

*Bryson:* I would like to recall just exactly what he did in this book. I doubt very much that it was planned in advance, in a self-conscious way. Here's a man of great and copious genius who just sat down one day and started writing with quite definite intentions, but without a very definite plan.

*Clements:* You are certainly right. As a matter of fact, there is a complete lack of unity, which we associate with medieval writing, rather than the formal unities of Renaissance writing. For example, at the end of the first book he tacks on an enigma which he borrows from another writer and which has absolutely no place there; at the end of the third book he does exactly the same thing.

*Bryson:* But what's in the first book, Mr. Clements?

*Clements:* Well, the first book—although it wasn't the first written—is the story of Gargantua. Gargantua was just a popular medieval giant.

*Bryson:* He borrowed this name?

*Clements:* He borrowed it from folklore; he also borrowed the whole idea of giants from Luigi Pulci and all the others who felt that giants were a source of humor. Gargantua, for example, rides a mare so big that he can steal the bells of Notre Dame to hang around her neck. Giants do funny things. We know this is common to all folklore.

*Villicaña:* Also, of course, Rabelais uses giants with a very deliberate purpose: to alter our perspective of what men are.

*Bryson:* Make a strange landscape?

*Villicaña*: Yes, create a myth in which we are made to surrender all our traditional perspectives where mind begins and body stops, where spirit ends and flesh begins. He sets out to confuse us, to alter every routinized way we may have of looking at ourselves and at others.

*Bryson*: Just for amusement or for teaching?

*Villicaña*: For great teaching, I think, because this alteration of our traditional ways of seeing ourselves—in Rabelais' own case, of course, the traditional medieval Christian way of looking at ourselves—is directed to reinstituting our natures, to opening up experience for us, to enhancing our powers, to heightening our thinking and our feeling, our acceptance of ourselves . . .

*Bryson*: This is pure Renaissance you're talking now, isn't it?

*Clements*: Well, it's also medieval, like the idea of a speculum—that is, a mirror in which you look to get a better view of yourself.

*Bryson*: Yes, but what the medieval man looked for was not a nature that he wanted to expand and develop, but something in which he wanted to find a deep moral significance. Isn't that right?

*Clements*: That's true, and Rabelais is interested in holding the mirror up to social man as well as religious man. On the other hand, it's a funny mirror. It's a mirror that magnifies or distorts, and this distortion is the basis of his humor. One of his characters, Triboulet, who is the jester at the court of Francis I, thinks that everybody else is a fool and that he's sane. In a sense Rabelais encouraged this idea. He showed the eccentricities of man, the exaggerated actions of man, with the idea that man will see this reflection of himself and try to improve. Actually, I think he was hoping that the ruling authorities, whether clerical or governmental, would be looking in this mirror rather than the people.

*Bryson*: You suggest there one of the dangers that Rabelais ran in writing this kind of book. After all, he had started out as a monk himself. Didn't he get into trouble by distorting humanity and then indicating that these distortions were as common on thrones and at the heads of abbeys and monasteries as they were among the common people?

*Villicaña*: I'd like to quarrel with that notion: I don't think there is distortion in Rabelais at all.

*Bryson*: Except the obvious distortion of giants and things like that?

*Villicaña*: Yes, but even that doesn't strike me as a distortion.

*Clements*: The allegory is certainly a distortion.

*Villicaña*: Yes, there is allegory, but the distortion, if there is any, is the sort of distortion that he found in Socrates, for example. Do you remember that the prologue begins by saying that "this book is going to be in some sense like the *Symposium*"?

*Bryson*: Did he mean that?

*Villicaña*: Yes, I think he did.

*Bryson*: It wasn't a joke?

*Villicaña*: It was a joke on the Neoplatonists, on the "official" interpreters of the *Symposium*, but it wasn't a joke on Plato or on

Socrates. He says that nobody who saw Socrates would have taken him to be anything. He was inelegant, he was even ugly—a disturbing person—coarse, old, lonely, and yet he contained within himself wisdom, the rarest kind of insight, and the greatest concern for the human soul. "And so it is with my book," Rabelais goes on to say.

*Clements*: But he was certainly anti-Platonist in many ways, wasn't he? He pokes fun at the whole concept of ideas, of idealism, of Plato.

*Bryson*: Well, he's anti-Neoplatonist; he's opposed to the Platonism of his day. But that's only his take-off. This is where he jumps into a world far more modern than one can find in fifth-century Athens. He may have thought of Socrates as a kind of embodiment of moral worth in an unworthy carcass, but are you disagreeing completely with Mr. Clements's idea that he made part of his point by fantastic exaggeration?

*Villicaña*: No, no—I would accept that. But I would not say, as I think Mr. Clements said if I understood him, that there is a distortion of what we understand our nature to be.

*Clements*: Well, distortion or exaggeration, if you prefer. Take the speech of the Queen Entelechy, the queen of perfection—she speaks in a very highly refined and precious way which poked fun at one of the cultural patterns of the time. And all through the book you have similar exaggeration of the foibles of mankind that Rabelais wants to hold up to this mirror we were talking about earlier.

*Villicaña*: Oh, yes, human nature distorts itself—that he knows. There are images in the book of unpleasant, narrow-minded, inflexible, precious people, but at the same time I think his own intention is to give us an image of ourselves which will humanize us.

*Bryson*: He wanted to do more than that, didn't he? He wanted not only to give us an image of ourselves—he wanted us to see ourselves as we were and call us back to our nature. This man was a good deal of a pedagogue.

*Clements*: Yes, his ideas on education are quite modern.

*Bryson*: And one has to see them against the background of his own education and his own early monastic experience; after all, this man started out as a monk but revolted against the life in the monasteries of his day.

*Clements*: Yes, he studied with the Franciscans, and even with the Benedictines; he studied law and medicine; he was one of the most learned men of his time—he never stopped studying.

*Bryson*: And he was a practicing doctor of that time.

*Clements*: He was so well known as a doctor that his medical lectures at the University of Montpellier were compulsory; he was one of the first to do autopsies, and so on. But his ideas on education—which are curiously similar to those of Montaigne, by the way—he expresses in three places. First, he has a lot of fun with the scholastic education of young Gargantua in the very first book. Gargantua studies the trivium and rote-memory and all those tricky things that the scholastics liked, such as learning the ABC's backward and forward. And when he gets up to demonstrate his Ciceronian training,



he's outshown by a twelve-year-old page boy. Later on his father, quite irate, puts him under another tutor who gives him a much broader curriculum—and here we have Rabelais stepping out and prescribing what was actually the basis of our own education in this country: Harvard College was started as a training school for gentlemen and scholars. Grandgousier wants his boy, his young giant, to know all the sciences but also, with a vengeance, he wants him to know artillery and the minting of coins and printing and so on; he wants him to be an abyss of knowledge.

*Bryson:* And that's the artisan side of the Renaissance, which is so often overlooked. It was not only learning they emphasized, it was also practical lore.

*Clements:* But this was what I meant by distortion. In other words, nobody in the Renaissance was really going to study artillery, coin-minting, and so on, to get a good education. But in the third phase Rabelais suggests a somewhat less ambitious program that is much closer to humanistic education.

*Villicaña:* I would agree that Rabelais doesn't want any more than we want, but he does want at least that much.

*Clements:* That's right. Man is to realize all of his potentialities, physical, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional. This is Rabelais's plea: man is not to be curbed, he is to avail himself of every possibility, intellectual and otherwise.

*Villicaña:* In fact, the first lesson in education that we actually find in the book is one that Gargantua's father received, when he learns that his young son has explored countless ways to clean himself and has found the best one to be with the neck of a goose . . .

*Bryson:* Typical Rabelaisian stuff.

*Villicaña:* Typical, but profoundly serious. The lesson amounts to this: that a child's intelligence is discovered by means of his physical activities.

*Bryson:* And in the four hundred years after, teachers more or less forgot that. It's only very recently that they've begun to realize that you approach a child's intelligence through his body.

*Clements:* I might add, Mr. Bryson, that we also have forgotten that in our universities we should be training gentlemen as well as scholars.

*Bryson:* But this idea of a gentleman that you have spoken of involves a moral element as well as manners. When he founded his famous "ideal monastery," Rabelais had a motto for it: "Do as you please." Was that because it doesn't matter what men do? This seems to be throwing overboard his morality.

*Clements:* Well, it was more than a lip service, really, to his new cult of man.

*Bryson:* Man in his nature?

*Clements:* Man fulfilling his nature, as I was saying earlier. He believes that man doesn't need any other authorities, that man by himself can learn to exploit all of his powers and his basic good tendencies. He did not like Calvin and those who believed that man was predestined evil—despite the fact that he was frequently against the

Roman Catholic Church, he felt that the Protestant view of man was not noble enough.

*Bryson*: I should say that he discarded the basic Christian view of man involving original sin; he didn't believe that man was by nature evil or infected with evil. In his view man could do as he pleased, because if he were properly brought up he'd do good and not evil. Isn't that what got him into trouble with both the Protestants and the Catholics of his own time?

*Villicaña*: Yes, that was one of the grounds for attack. He seemed to countenance a kind of freedom that the Church found dangerous, and which indeed may be dangerous. I think Rabelais himself is aware of how dangerous it is to say to man "do what thou wilt." It is not certain that in following your own nature you'll always produce the good, and Rabelais nowhere says that it is.

*Clements*: No, but Rabelais couldn't see anyone else whom you might do better to follow. He criticizes everybody: the courts, the monarchy—although very cautiously—the Church, whether Protestant or Catholic. He was a tremendous social critic. . . .

*Villicaña*: If I may interrupt you, I think it's true that he found no institution—the university and the Church, the two main institutions, are under attack throughout the book—but there *is* one authority, and that is human reason.

*Clements*: That's right.

*Villicaña*: Human reason and human instinct. These are two God-given powers that man may develop for his own profit, for his own enhancement.

*Clements*: Exactly, and he even uses the adjective "unfailing"; he says that "man has an unfailing instinct which is called honor."

*Bryson*: But he still thinks that man should be brought up under an educational regime that would bring out the essential good in him.

*Clements*: The fulfillment idea again.

*Bryson*: The fulfillment of man's natural goodness. He would have said, wouldn't he, that he was a very religious man, although he attacked all of the religious institutions and persons of his time?

*Clements*: Many of the humanists felt that they were good Christians, of course, but *he* didn't have that reputation. Julius Caesar Scaliger wrote an epigram to him after he died and said that he was such an atheist that even the dogs wouldn't eat his cadaver.

*Bryson*: That wasn't just because of his coarseness?

*Clements*: Oh, no—this is what he believed. But this is a thing we're familiar with in modern times, persecution of people for their ideas—and he was certainly persecuted.

*Villicaña*: I think he would have said he was a good Christian; I think he would have said it with irony, given the usual understanding of the word.

*Bryson*: What about the modern understanding of the word, Mr. Villicaña?

*Villicaña*: I think we could define Christianity in such a way that we would find it in Rabelais.

*Bryson*: But doesn't he in ways that are sometimes a little subtle

and hard to find—but, nevertheless, very definitely there—prophetically point toward the modern point of view?

*Villicaña*: I should think so, but I must say that perhaps the “moderns” tend to be Christians with greater ease. Rabelais doesn’t find it easy, not only because official authorities censored and opposed him, but because he understood that an acknowledgement of our nature can be as destructive as it can be fruitful—that although man is given instincts which can lead to honor, as you say, he is also given instincts which can lead to war.

*Clements*: May I make a point on this question of religion? Actually, in Rabelais you see a man of the Reformation, although with certain reservations about that. But he dramatizes all of the criticisms of the temporal Church which were being written about elsewhere in very learned language; you find his characters actually walking up and buying indulgences, you find the devil disturbed by students indulging in free examination of scripture, you see monks like the Fredon monks who are living a somewhat dissolute life, you see his indignation about the sending of French money to Italy, you see his criticisms of Lent as something anti-nature. I think that the interest of Rabelais’s religious thinking is that he dramatizes the Reformational objections to the Roman Church.

*Bryson*: Although he himself never entered the Protestant faith.

*Villicaña*: One can be, I think anti-institutional without being necessarily anti-Christian.

*Bryson*: It seems to me that what you gentlemen have described is the great type of the humorist. The humorist always is in a quarrel with the institutions and the persons of his time. If he’s a really great humorist he’s essentially and at base, probably, a conservative who believes in the principles with even more sincerity and completeness than the people whom he is satirizing.

## JONATHAN SWIFT

### *Gulliver’s Travels*

(As broadcast July 22, 1956)

LEO GURKO

• GEORGE N. SHUSTER •

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: Swift had no hesitation about creating a multiplicity of strange landscapes; he just went from one to another. But there does seem to have been some kind of system in this series of extraordinary adventures that his rather dull but observant English sea captain made.

*Shuster*: That’s right. Shortly before the book was published, in 1726, Swift had devoted himself assiduously to preparation. I think

we can see rather clearly just what happened. The first, second and fourth parts were written in sequence—that is, the voyage to Lilliput, the voyage to Brobdingnag, and the voyage to the Houyhnhnms. Each one of these parts has a kind of satire that is relatively amiable, relatively more philosophic than Rabelaisian . . .

*Bryson:* Getting less amiable, though, all the time.

*Shuster:* Less and less, yes.

*Gurko:* More and more of the preacher comes to the fore.

*Shuster:* But part three, which was written subsequently—probably on the basis of notes which he had collected earlier—is a form of anti-intellectualist satire in which he groups together many of his favorite enemies.

*Bryson:* Yes, the structure—and it's important in a book like this because he evidently was trying to make a total effect by an increasing severity toward his fellow man—goes a bit askew with the Laputa incident in the third section. Laputa is a flying island on which the king lived and which is very much like a dirigible nowadays.

*Gurko:* It is true that the third voyage suffers from a certain diffuseness of landscape. He doesn't confine himself just to one ingenious island, he travels to several of them. And voyage three is also filled with a tremendous amount of rather ingenuous satire directed against science and scientists, about which Swift was almost totally ignorant; he makes a good deal of fun of it, but perhaps not so convincingly as elsewhere.

*Bryson:* But, isn't it rather a habit of satirists to make fun of science?

*Gurko:* When all else fails. Science is, of course, the inevitable thing they fall back on for their ultimate ingenuities. But there is one element in voyage three which gives it an organic link with the progression of satire that Mr. Shuster was describing, and that is the incident with those strange creatures whom Swift calls by one of his most remarkable and cacophonous and horrifying names: the Struldbrugs.

*Shuster:* One has to be in perfect dental condition, I think, to get through the nomenclature of *Gulliver's Travels*. But these Struldbrugs are old men who have won the secret of physical immortality and are now living forever.

*Bryson:* Do you mean *won* the secret of it? They were *born* immortal.

*Shuster:* At any rate, they are endowed with it. And Gulliver who, like so many men, is anxious to discover the secret of immortality—this is one of our great historical dreams—is nevertheless so horrified by the condition of the Struldbrugs, in whom the infirmities of old age and nothing else are permanently memorialized, that he becomes infinitely disgusted with the idea of living forever. And this prepares the way, in the final voyage to the Houyhnhnms, for his great consideration of the idea of life and death as approached by the Yahoos and by the noble horses themselves.

*Gurko:* I'm always reminded by these horrible Struldbrugs, who represent a certain triumph of destiny, of Mr. Aldous Huxley's *After*

*Many a Summer Dies the Swan.* It's a sort of satire on what is one of the underlying moods of our civilization—namely, to suppose if we kept on living forever it would be interesting and agreeable. For these people it is horrible and, of course, it's horrible also for the spectator.

*Bryson:* Yes, because they keep on living at the very limit of their physical existence. They don't have anything left. They aren't human beings, really, any more; they're just little shells blown about by the wind. They can't die and that's the one thing they most want to do.

*Gurko:* Swift himself was convinced that death is a kind of natural release from life, a kind of perfect and harmonious ending to it. The desire to live forever is exactly that kind of animal egotism from which human nature in its unreasonable aspects was suffering most.

*Shuster:* Yes, this is part of the classical tradition which, of course, comes to life again in Swift as it did in Ben Jonson—a stoicism which assumes that you should be content with a natural and normal destiny and not try through academic methods to change it into something it wasn't supposed to be.

*Bryson:* Well, what about the anti-scientism in this? Is that part of Swift's general attitude, or is he just indulging personal spleen?

*Shuster:* I think it was the anti-intellectualist, the anti-university concept that was so pronounced in the Scriblerus Club, out of which most of this particular section grows.

*Bryson:* Common to moralists, isn't it, Mr. Shuster?

*Shuster:* Yes, common to moralists. I mean the assumption of the intellectual that he can change things around by applying his gadgets and make man into something he wasn't supposed to be. It is an attitude that runs through all generations, I think.

*Bryson:* Don't we have it now? Don't we have the people who say: "You can't make society better or life any more livable unless we improve our personal characters"? Which may be true.

*Shuster:* Certainly!

*Gurko:* Still, we shouldn't pass over this third voyage without saying at least one word about the political satire and the schemes for political reform in it. One idea is that all senators should vote *opposite* to the speeches which they have been making; and it's also suggested that a hundred senators from each party should have their skulls split in half and the opposing halves joined together, so that political and public debates can go on *inside* the skulls of the legislators.

*Bryson:* I know a lot of Senators with whom you couldn't possibly do that, because when they get through making a speech you don't know which side they've been arguing on.

*Gurko:* Swift obviously didn't foresee the American Senate.

*Shuster:* What I like especially about part three is the section dealing with mathematicians.

*Bryson:* Don't you like mathematicians, Mr. Shuster?

*Shuster:* I'm very fond of them, but I did enjoy the spectacle of these mathematicians being unable to control their ladies, their wives,

because of their absorption in circles and squares and triangles. In other words, Swift is indicating that if you once leave the ground of reality and of normal human relationships for a world of abstraction, you're bound to get into trouble.

*Gurko*: He was against every kind of science and inquiry except that which had some immediate practical utility. I especially like that group of mathematicians who had developed a scheme of teaching mathematical equations through ingurgitation. They inscribed their equations in cephalic ink on wafers; when these wafers were eaten and digested, by some mysterious process the equation was registered on the brain, where it impacted forever.

*Bryson*: It sounds like very progressive education.

*Shuster*: It sounds to me something like this: Swift must at one time or other have been a freshman attempting to meet the mathematics requirement and wildly looking for a way to do it.

*Bryson*: When Swift said mathematicians got into trouble with their wives because they thought too much about angles, he completely neglected to say anything about curves—which I should think would have been almost a necessary sequence in his logic.

*Gurko*: You're suggesting a much too amiable form of satire, Mr. Bryson.

*Bryson*: At this point in the third book I guess he had gotten beyond his amiability. Let's go back to the very first voyage, the voyage to Lilliput which, I suppose, is the basis for calling this a children's book. Editions of this book for children generally, or very often, don't go beyond Lilliput, where the voyager is huge and the people he meets are little; that is, he makes man little to show him up.

*Gurko*: It's ironical that these travels which are an immense attack on human nature and the possibilities for the human future should have been enshrined almost immediately after their publication as a children's classic, and that they can be read simply as wonderfully entertaining and ingenious and imaginative stories. One can pay really very little attention to the ideas and to the satire there, and still find that the book has its independent autonomy.

*Bryson*: It gets a little difficult in the fourth book. But in this first book, where he's dealing with the Lilliputians, it's very easy. What's he saying about the Lilliputians?

*Shuster*: I think that what he's doing is reducing the human race to its proper dimensions.

*Bryson*: Do you mean that Swift here puts us where we belong?

*Shuster*: Where he *thought* we belong. These people were, on the whole, a very amiable lot, but they were small, they were insignificant, although the Burgundy they produce for their distinguished guest is of first-rate quality.

*Bryson*: Yes, although it takes so many thimblefuls to make a draught . . .

*Shuster*: But when you get it in you, it's good. The food is excellent; the workmanship of the people is delightful; as a matter of fact, their basic laws and concepts are very, very good. They are the inheritors of long ages of reflection and of safe counsel. The difficulty

is, of course, that they have been corrupted—and in their corruption they are ridiculous, although they never, somehow or other, leave the realm of amiability.

*Gurko*: Certainly they're a delightful mixture of vice and virtue; they have many admirable qualities and, as you say, many corrupting ones as well. And for a long while, even before these things become plain, we're immensely entertained and fascinated by the description of the customs of the Lilliputians—the jumping over sticks for the winning of political office, the setting off of civil wars on the basis of breaking eggs at the small end or at the large. There are such wonderfully ingenious and delightful touches as the crown prince who is secretly in sympathy with the large-enders, but officially the party of his father are the small-enders, and so he wears one of his shoes with a high heel and one with a low heel and goes limping along by way of indicating that he's straddling the fence.

*Bryson*: You say they're corrupt. The worst corruption, of course, is in their king. But it's just normal human ambition, isn't it, that the king should want to go over and capture the nearest island, also inhabited by very little people?

*Gurko*: Certainly it was characteristic of Swift's time. And this is satire on the English court and on the political life of the day as he had himself experienced it.

*Bryson*: Why didn't Gulliver, being so powerful that he could settle this war with a wave of his hand, go ahead and do it? Why didn't he enter the service of this king and give him an empire? He could have been a great man.

*Shuster*: I think it's because he found these people just too ridiculous to merit any such action on his part . . .

*Bryson*: Too ridiculous because too little?

*Shuster*: Because little, and because all the things they were concerned with were paltry things. And then I believe that in the first book Gulliver still sees himself as a repository of infinite goodness and wisdom and, therefore, also of moral judgment; he thinks the war is wrong.

*Bryson*: You don't see Gulliver just as a lay figure, then? He's a man of character.

*Shuster*: Oh, I think that Gulliver is Swift in very many ways.

*Gurko*: Sometimes Swift associates himself with Gulliver's point of view, as he obviously does in the voyage to Lilliput. Gulliver expresses a tremendous moral horror at the Lilliputian desire not simply to repel the invasion of their enemies but also to conquer them and enslave them; he refuses to let his superior power be put to this morally corrupt purpose. But later on, in the other voyages, Gulliver and Swift quite plainly part company and Gulliver speaks more like a Lilliputian and less like Swift himself. It's the infinite variety of points of view expressed through Gulliver that gives the book its variety, its complexity, and its constant reader-interest.

*Bryson*: Complexity that does have some character unity, however.

*Gurko*: Yes.

*Bryson*: Before we move on to something less amiable, are you disturbed by the fact that the climax of the Lilliputian adventure really rests upon a mild obscenity? Here is this bunch of little atomies, who are no bigger than flies, around the feet of this great giant of a man—or so he seemed to them. Are you disturbed by what he does?

*Shuster*: Well, I think it's in the great tradition of this kind of satire. It's in Rabelais. It's a way of manifesting how ridiculous the whole show is . . .

*Bryson*: And isn't it true that all satirists find the body and its ordinary functions ridiculous?

*Shuster*: I think so, and I think it's particularly true of Swift.

*Gurko*: But that reference to the way in which he extinguishes the fire in the queen's apartments . . .

*Bryson*: Quite natural, when you stop to think about it.

*Gurko*: Yes. And it's regarded by some students of Swift as his way of getting back at that royal prude, as he called her, Queen Anne. He was annoyed by her remarks about *A Tale of A Tub*, an earlier book by him which didn't receive too happy a public reception in her eyes.

*Bryson*: That could be, but of course it could also be explained for satirical reasons even if there were no topical reasons for it. After all, as Mr. Shuster says, this is what satirists always do. But then Gulliver goes on another voyage to a land where, instead of being very much bigger than everyone else, he's very much smaller than everybody else. He is the Lilliputian here, and the inhabitants, who think themselves as normal, are enormous giants. Things get a bit coarser.

*Shuster*: The coarseness manifests itself in terms of the nature of the giants, but there is also a progression, a rather remarkable one it seems to me, in terms of moral ability and quality. These big people are better people than he is . . .

*Bryson*: But he doesn't think they're better just because they're bigger?

*Gurko*: May I venture a dissent on that? Not all of them are better. For example, there's the Brobdingnagian farmer who gets him in the first place and who is perfectly willing to exploit and work him to death for the sake of squeezing the last possible amount of money out of the public exhibitions into which he puts Gulliver. It's the Brobdingnagian king, the scientists, and the philosophers who are morally superior.

*Shuster*: This is a Platonic republic and the people who are conducting it, the king and his advisers, are superior—so that when finally he is told that he belongs to the "most pernicious race of little odious vermin," I think he really feels for a moment that that's what he does belong to and that he's dealing here with a nobler form of being.

*Bryson*: Are we saying that when you put man in association with human-like creatures that are infinitely smaller, he finds their vices ridiculous, but when you put him in contact with men that are magnificently bigger, they seem noble just because they're bigger?

*Shuster*: I didn't have that feeling. In the first place I think that



in the kind of apparition they present, they manifest in magnified form all the unattractive characteristics of human nature.

*Gurko*: You remember that scene where Gulliver is picked up by his first Brobdingnagian. He is lifted sixty feet off the ground and sees the skin of this Brobdingnagian farmer immensely magnified. The description of the pores of the skin and of all the disgusting bacterial growth which he sees crawling in and out is really Swift's own expression of horror at the bestiality of the human body.

*Bryson*: Yes, and it gets worse, of course, when he begins to associate with the Brobdingnagian women. His dislike of the physical becomes pretty bitter here. You're beginning to get closer to Swift's neurosis, aren't you?

*Shuster*: I think so. On the other hand, there are many delightful episodes in this book which are charming for their own sakes. For example, the fact that the Queen has a boat made for him in which eight ordinary Gullivers could sit, and then a long tunnel-like thing filled with water in which he can sail up and down and amuse everybody. This reduces Gulliver himself somewhat to the proportions of a child.

*Bryson*: And then, when you go on to the land of the Houyhnhnms, he is reduced spiritually to a still lower level than he's been reduced physically. The satire now becomes terrible.

*Shuster*: Yes. This is the great moralist lambasting the human race and, personally, I think you have to approach it in the following mood: it is an attack on the four libidos, pride and lust particularly. The pride of man must be assailed with all the weapons in the satirist's arsenal, so that finally you're reminded of nobody so much, I think, as Hogarth. In the vision of the Yahoo he projects the reality of the human race, not so much for the purpose of being understood realistically but rather, I think, being understood as the preacher who is now effectively drumming hellfire into his audience.

*Gurko*: And yet there isn't this sense of absolute hopelessness that I think is often, perhaps inaccurately, associated with Swift and *Gulliver's Travels*. Although the Yahoos are certainly corrupted and bestialized, although Swift emphasizes their filth much more than he does their savagery, Gulliver himself—and this is the fascinating psychological drama in voyage four—passes from a state where he recognizes his basic association with the Yahoos . . .

*Bryson*: He is one!

*Gurko*: Yes, but he strives toward the nobility of the Houyhnhnms themselves, so that he actually dissociates himself from the Yahoos and is horrified when the Houyhnhnms finally expel him from their paradise. When he gets back home to England, you may remember, he is so disgusted with the corruption of the people around him that he doesn't want to have anything to do with them, even with his wife and children.

*Bryson*: But it isn't only because they're corrupt, Mr. Gurko, it's because they're *human*. I read more bitterness into it than you seem to. The rational creatures in this last land that he visits are horses, who are not afraid of death, who are kind, who are wise, and

whose servants are these horrible creatures in whom after a moment Gulliver recognizes man.

*Gurko*: Yes, but there is in Gulliver also the capacity to be like the Houyhnhnms themselves.

*Bryson*: He wants to be!

*Gurko*: And the whole point of voyage four is that he makes a great moral and partly successful effort to be like them. As a matter of fact, even the Houyhnhnms recognize that although he looks like the other Yahoos, he is really different from them.

*Bryson*: He's a *clean* Yahoo.

*Gurko*: And some of the Houyhnhnms are against his expulsion on the grounds that here is a kind of biological mutation which really should not deserve the fate of his apparent compatriots.

*Bryson*: A man almost nice enough to be a horse.

*Shuster*: I think that at the end of this book Swift shows a sort of impulse to run away from human history—to be a cenobite, a hermit in the desert. I recalled, as I read this, a book by Thomas Merton, the American Trappist, in which he talks of walking through the monastery in the middle of the night and noticing the snores and the smells of the people who are living in it, and then feeling that perhaps it would be much better if he went away from all this into some little cell on a mountainside.

*Bryson*: Get away from humanity?

*Shuster*: Get away from humanity completely. This same attitude comes to the fore when Gulliver, upon returning from his voyages, finds it almost impossible to associate with his own family.

*Gurko*: And yet on the voyage home, after he's expelled from the final island, he is picked up by a Portuguese sea captain of a very noble type, a character based apparently upon one of Swift's closest and most admired friends, Dr. Arbuthnot. Captain Pedro is a remarkable and compassionate human being who almost weans Gulliver out of his misanthropy. Later, in a famous letter to Pope, Swift was to say that "if the world had a dozen Arbuthnots in it, I would burn my *Travels*."

*Shuster*: And then he also says that he hates and detests that animal called "man" although he heartily loves John, Peter, Thomas, and so on.

*Bryson*: There again he's being more or less the conventional satirist, isn't he? He forgives individuals because he loves them, but he can't forgive them for being members of this horrible collectivity, the human race. Well, is it despair really? Does Swift mean for you to think of Gulliver as having given us up completely?

*Shuster*: I don't think so at all. In his own day, as far as we are now able to tell, no one saw in this book a manifesto of despair. It was accepted as a great work in the long tradition of satire and of preaching. As a matter of fact, many of the greatest and most effective pulpit orators of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries talked in precisely these terms and in the same language. But then, subsequently, when we began to imagine that there had been a primitive time in which man had been good and that he had now degenerated into some-

thing worse, Gulliver began to be looked upon as a symbol of absolute despair. He was seen as a man who manifested the fact that human nature could not be redeemed.

*Gurko*: I agree that the bitterness and the misanthropy are not nearly as great in Swift's own mind as Mr. Bryson felt they were a moment or two ago. Nevertheless, we must remember that Swift himself, in speaking of the *Travels*, says that his aim is to vex the world not to divert it. He was doing more than simply telling a story, he was expressing his basic point of view as well.

*Bryson*: Perhaps I was trying to defend Swift as a man or as a moralist at the expense of his artistic wholeness. It seems to me the book has many moods. In the Houyhnhnm chapter, where horses are rational and men are beasts of burden, I think there's great bitterness. But the amiability of the Lilliput section seems to me just as much part of Swift and just as final a comment as the others. After all, these are different aspects of humanity's amusing character.

*Shuster*: Yes, I agree. It's a sort of symphony, in three parts instead of four, in which there is a progressive movement toward violent, unrestrained, and intensely dark invective.

*Gurko*: But in the middle of this progression there is, of course, one of the great imaginations of English literature at work, so that we are constantly diverted and absorbed and charmed and bemused at the same time that Swift's hammer blows at our essential nature are being delivered against us.

*Shuster*: And it is in this infinite variety that *Gulliver's Travels* retains its bloom—above all, perhaps symbolically, in the infinite variety of the scene.

*Bryson*: In the infinite variety of the scene and in something we haven't even mentioned, I suppose because we've come to take it for granted: the greatest of the simple prose-styles in English, a style that can do absolutely anything Swift wants it to do; there are lightness and poetry when he wants to have them, but above all there are these hammer blows which seem to be his deepest purpose.

## EDGAR ALLAN POE

### Short Stories

(As broadcast July 29, 1956)

JAMES C. EARLY

PERRY MILLER

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: Edgar Allan Poe's reputation as a prose writer is more for terror stories than for anything else; but although I can remember the sensation I've had from almost all of his stories, somehow or other I never remember his landscapes.

*Early*: I think this is partly because Poe is not interested in landscapes in themselves.

*Bryson*: But he made some strange ones.

*Early*: He's very careful to develop landscapes to bring out character; he's not trying to make the landscape itself memorable, but merely to reinforce something in the story proper.

*Miller*: I think that's right. Certainly the classic example in all the writings of Poe is the opening of *The Fall of the House of Usher*. It's very difficult to tell, even when you've got the text in front of you, just how that landscape is effective—particularly as he really steps in front of it to moralize about it. He says: "There are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of affecting us. Still, the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth." Then he goes on to say that perhaps another arrangement—he uses the word "arrangement"—of the particulars of this scene would have had a different effect. But the arrangement that he's somehow describing without really describing it is one of terror.

*Bryson*: Do you mean that all of Poe's strange landscapes—which, as Mr. Early says, are used as actors in his drama—are never exactly described?

*Miller*: Not exactly described in the sense that they would be in a contemporary romance by, say, James Fenimore Cooper.

*Early*: Poe is attempting to be more suggestive than absolutely descriptive in his use of landscape. In *The Fall of the House of Usher* there is an attempt to make a quite clear relation between the hero of that story, Roderick Usher, and the house in which he lived. The story is the fall of the House of Usher in two senses, the physical disintegration of the building and at the same time the end of Usher and his sister as the last two members of the family.

*Bryson*: It's rather typical of Poe, isn't it, that he can't leave anything out? Not only must the family of Usher go down, but the actual building has to collapse into the melancholy tarn.

*Miller*: Ah, that is the point: this is a manipulated and artificial world. He doesn't for one minute pretend that this is a natural phenomenon which has some explanation, such as a hidden cask of powder in the cellar. This, it seems to me, is where Poe—in American literature and particularly in the literature of his time—is an amazing and magnificent figure. He is practically the only one who rejects the idea that the natural scene, the natural backdrop, should envelop and enfold and teach man; no "impulse from the vernal wood" translates itself into *his* heart. He is master of the scene and he himself arranges and places these natural objects, improving upon nature, and does it with the utmost deliberateness.

*Early*: Yes; unlike Thoreau, Poe is not merely trying to represent landscape as it is, but is consciously shaping it as an artist.

*Bryson*: And he isn't trying to squeeze meaning out of it the way some of the romantics who preceded him did?

*Early*: No. For Poe, landscape is one of the materials of art rather than something that is, in a sense, divine in its own right.

*Bryson*: When you bring in the word "divine," however, that

immediately suggests another aspect of Poe's attitude toward nature. You say he manipulates nature; does that mean he thinks he's a kind of Creator himself?

*Early*: Yes, I think Poe glories in the artist as a creator in his own right.

*Bryson*: And he means Creator with a big C?

*Miller*: I think so. He always emphasizes that the artist creates by novel combinations of forms, not by imitating natural forms. I think one of the important clues to Poe's work as an artist is a sketch that's not widely read called *The Domain of Arnheim*, which is his dream of a super landscape gardener. The thing about this landscape gardener is that he *improves* on nature, he manipulates the planting in order to give the observer an impression, he says, "of richness, warmth, color, quietude, uniformity, softness, delicacy, daintiness, voluptuousness, and a miraculous extremeness of culture."

*Bryson*: Yes, but how strange that sounds coming from Poe as we ordinarily think of him. This isn't the haunted dipsomaniac with the dying wife, chasing around the alleys of New York trying to pick up a couple of dollars for writing a piece of bad prose which is really great stuff although nobody realizes it; he's talking about delicacy, he's talking about comfort and warmth. What goes wrong here?

*Miller*: Well, that's the riddle of Poe. I think this legend of Poe, the dipsomaniac and the man of terror, has so obscured the real figure of Poe that we don't realize that here was a very remarkable mind, attached to an unstable body and a suffering spirit; but it was a mind capable of such objectivity as to be really amazing.

*Early*: I think it's often forgotten that Poe wrote a number of different kinds of stories, that Poe wrote humorous burlesques . . .

*Bryson*: Which are not very funny.

*Early*: No, not very funny. But Poe was very proud of his virtuosity as a writer. He certainly did not think of himself entirely as a writer of tales of terror and tales of ratiocination; he thought of himself as a very versatile man of letters, able to write a number of different types of stories.

*Bryson*: Are you saying that he wrote what the market would take?

*Miller*: That's true, you know, to some extent. There is enough evidence to show that many of these stories over which young readers swoon were actually written according to a formula, which he himself could very explicitly set forth. And we always must remember that he was a very practical journalist.

*Bryson*: And a fairly successful one.

*Miller*: Oh, he pushed up the circulation of every magazine that he had a chance to work on.

*Early*: Poe in every sense was a professional, I think, compared with many of his contemporaries.

*Miller*: He was practically the *only* professional of his time.

*Bryson*: You gentlemen are raising a question that always bothers those who want to read genius according to some kind of scale. When a man is a craftsman and says "if the public wants horror, I'll give

them horror," does that mean that he was merely a craftsman? This has arisen in connection with a great many figures besides Poe.

*Miller:* It is a very difficult problem with Poe. He could apparently meretriciously write according to this formula. But then, when you come right down to it, there is also another compulsion within the formula, so it is much too simple to say that he did these stories simply as a smart, slick writer exploiting the market; on the other hand, it is equally wrong to say he did them because he was haunted by mad emotions.

*Bryson:* We must get one point clear, however: this man did have a tough time of it. His sufferings were not imaginary even though he was a fairly prosperous writer. There was the death of his wife, his trouble with dipsomania, and so on.

*Early:* Oh, he had a very difficult time of it.

*Bryson:* But he wasn't a haunted spirit, merely expressing his haunts at so much per hundred words.

*Early:* Not at all, Mr. Bryson. But it shouldn't be forgotten that Poe was a rather unusual man, that he wasn't the sort of person that you meet walking down the street every day. That there is something rather strange about Poe I think we must face. Poe begins quite consciously to imitate a type of story that's popular in English magazines, and then, in a sense, this kind of story takes hold of him; certain motifs become repetitious—the notion of premature burial . . .

*Bryson:* Yes, there's so much of that in his stories.

*Early:* So many characters arise from the dead that they seem to suggest some kind of mental preoccupation.

*Miller:* I think part of the reason is that we don't understand what kind of mind Poe had—if he had a mind in the first place—and that he saw in art itself a liberation from humanity, from the defects of humanity. To go back again to this fantastic landscape garden that he described: he says Ellison thought that by thus manipulating it he would find exemption from the ordinary cares of humanity. And Poe, I think, had a very sharp sense that art as a manipulation and artifice was not opposed to nature, that it was itself a godlike activity and that the artist was a kind of divinity. And, indeed, he may have gone so far in his megalomania as eventually in his last year or so to have identified himself with the Divinity—because, in a cosmological treatise that all his contemporaries made fun of, he wound up with the famous statement that "the universe is the plot of God." That is, that the natural world is itself an artificial construction from the Divine point of view.

*Early:* I think that this glorification of art for its own sake, apart from any immediate contact with the realities of life, is one of the things in Poe that have been most influential upon modern writers.

*Miller:* Well, maybe. When you say art for its own sake, it doesn't really mean in Poe what we usually convey by the phrase "art for art's sake," does it?

*Bryson:* It's not the late nineteenth century kind of thing.

*Miller:* No, it's something more powerful than that.

*Bryson:* Art for the artist's sake, I should say—art for the sake

of the creative process, which only the artist can manage; only he can ride the whirlwind. It's not for the object created, it's for the creation, isn't it?

*Early:* Yes, I agree.

*Miller:* And that brings us back again to these strange landscapes. For example, in the early story *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, he has them go to the South Pole; here is a completely unnatural world, with rocks such as are never found in nature and a sea unlike any sea. It's all a phantasmagoria, and you can see the pleasure he's taking in creating this wholly artificial world.

*Bryson:* Here's the invention, at least in its modern form, of science fiction.

*Miller:* That is quite true. The description of the earth as seen from a balloon is really a remarkable piece of science fiction for its day, when the idea of ascending high into the stratosphere was unthinkable.

*Bryson:* As far as the imagination is concerned, Poe is one of the very few artists who can construct an imaginary landscape in a way that makes you believe that that's what it would have to be.

*Early:* Well, I'm not sure that I fully go along with that, because we come back again to this question of artifice.

*Bryson:* Oh, I don't mean that after you think it over you will always feel that way. But while you're reading you're completely lost in his construction, aren't you?

*Early:* I think you sometimes are, though the mystery is *why* you are.

*Miller:* Well, that is a curious thing. Take *The Fall of the House of Usher*, for example. When the whirlwind suddenly throws the windows open and we look out on the stormy sea, "the under surfaces of the huge masses of agitated vapor, as well as all terrestrial . . ."

*Bryson:* Wait a minute! I'm not sure when the Miller prose stopped and the Poe prose began. Will you put your quote in?

*Miller:* Yes, the whirlwind opens the window and they had no glimpse of moon or stars; there was nothing but darkness. And then Poe says: "The under surfaces of the huge masses of agitated vapor, as well as all terrestrial objects immediately around us, were glowing in the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which hung about and enshrouded the mansion." Now that's amazingly unspecific, and yet I insist it's very effective.

*Early:* It seems to me that Poe intends to be unspecific, that this is part of his effect.

*Miller:* He says that, doesn't he? Of course, he says it more distinctly about poetry.

*Bryson:* Yes, but here isn't he claiming for the prose writer the privilege of the poet?

*Early:* I think that's right; often there is a tendency in the Poe stories to adopt the devices of the poetry.

*Bryson:* A vagueness which is nevertheless hugely suggestive. He creates a kind of sound which, without being anything specific, does something to you. How can a man like this, then, turn around and

write the first successful hard-bitten, logical detective stories in our literature?

*Early*: This seems one of the central problems with Poe: that on the one hand you have the man who admires the mathematical mind of the detective . . .

*Bryson*: Not only admires it but exemplifies it.

*Miller*: Exemplifies it, really. I think it's the same thing that we're struggling with in these natural descriptions. If Poe were the sort of man who yielded to the benign influences of nature, he would not have created a detective. But because, as artist, he was manipulator of the scene, he could also project himself into the mind of the detective who manipulates the evidence and finds the solution. So that really all of his nature passages, such as these in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, are, as a matter of fact, mysteries or riddles to be read the way the fictional detective reads them. The reader has to be the detective.

*Early*: Curiously enough, Poe thinks of the detective Dupin, his famous creation, as part poet. His poetry assumes some of the character of detective work, and the opposite is true as well.

*Bryson*: Do you think he really means it when he says that to write a poem—I think he specifically said it about *The Raven*—he has a formula, just the way a man has a plan for making a chair or table; he knows exactly how many words of this kind and how many words of that kind and how many repetitions, and he puts them all together and has a great poem. Did he really mean that, or is he spoofing us?

*Early*: I think there's a good deal of spoof in that essay. I don't feel that Poe is entirely the tormented genius, pouring out the sufferings of his own soul—I think it's more complex than that. But neither do I accept the completely rational explanation given in that essay on *The Raven*. I think the truth lies somewhere between the two extremes.

*Miller*: Well, this is the same problem that confronts us in the tales of terror—that he had a formula and yet there is something more than the formula. Of course, by this time it's late in his life and his energies are dissipated and he's really going to pieces. And so a good deal of that essay on *The Raven* is really the expression of a tired man, desperately trying to hold himself together.

*Bryson*: Do you reject altogether the idea that Poe was a man who thought of himself as a craftsman, but, being bigger than he thought, when he tried to exercise his craft he couldn't keep from exercising his genius at the same time? That is, he took a form and said, in effect, "Okay, this is what people will buy; I'll write them tales of terror, I'll write them detective stories, I'll write them science fiction." (They hadn't invented the word yet.) But in each case he was far too great a man merely to produce the market article.

*Miller*: Oh, I think that's quite true, if you compare him with the kind of stuff that was appearing in contemporary magazines, all of which is forgotten (only antiquarians like myself go back and read it, and I get very bored with it, whereas I do not get bored with Poe). I myself come back to saying that I think part of the explanation is



that demoniac drive in Poe to be godlike, to use whatever material he had, whether it was nature or the detective story, to put himself as artist above and beyond the ordinary cares of life. And, of course, you can sentimentalize that by saying he was trying to escape from his own hard life. But that's only sentimentality, I think.

*Early*: And I feel also that there's a deliberate desire to shock in the essay on *The Raven*, an attack upon the school of writers who believe that a poet should sit down and write off the top of his head.

*Bryson*: I thought it was from the bottom of his heart, Mr. Early.

*Miller*: At any rate I think Poe was clear, preternaturally clear from the beginning of his conscious life, that the artist should not be one who wrote out of a fine frenzy.

*Bryson*: When you look at Poe's life, at his rejection by his foster family and his desperation in his early youth, he must have had what we would call in these days a very neurotic sense of insecurity.

*Miller*: Oh, there's no question about it. It's true.

*Bryson*: This is part of his contempt for the world around him and for most of the people in it. "I am a poet. I am as much of a god as you will ever see on earth, and you think that I do this under a compulsion. I don't. I know exactly what I'm doing."

*Miller*: One of these not-very-humorous things that you were referring to is called *The Adventures of Thingumbob, Esq.*—nobody reads it—and it's a satire on a popular journalist. He makes fun of himself, too, but he says: "What did I do all this time that I was writing for these cheap journals? I consumed the midnight oil. You should have seen me, you should. I leaned to the right, I leaned to the left, I sat forward, I sat backward, and through all I wrote; through joy and through sorrow I wrote; through hunger and through thirst I wrote; through good report and through ill report I wrote; through sunshine and through moonshine I wrote." In the midst of this comic and very silly piece, there is that magnificent defiance of his contemporary. He, the godlike Poe, wrote no matter what was happening; no matter whether he was hungry or his wife was dying or he was beset by madness or drink, he wrote!

*Bryson*: Well, what does it add up to, when you take a man like this who called himself both god and craftsman?

*Miller*: It's difficult to add up.

*Bryson*: Can you add it up? There's his style. It's almost impossible for any good judge to pick up a page of Poe and not guess that it's Poe, whatever he's writing about.

*Miller*: Well, at his best.

*Bryson*: Once you've read as many of his contemporaries as you have, Mr. Miller, perhaps you get him mixed up with some of his imitators.

*Miller*: And Poe is not always at his best.

*Early*: No, but Poe is recognizable, I think.

*Bryson*: Well, what is the quality that gives unity to this duality of personality and this tremendous application of craftsmanship to so many kinds of fiction, to say nothing of his poetry?

*Early:* I think we're driven back to the view of Poe as the conscious artist. It seems to me that this alone is able to pull together the very diverse threads of this personality, the numbers of different kinds of writing, and even at times different styles of writing.

*Bryson:* You mean he had more than one style?

*Early:* In certain stories, such as *A Descent into the Maelström*, you have Poe writing in a clear, concise, simple style, rather than the packed, heavy, exclamatory style that we are more familiar with.

*Bryson:* Yet he gets an effect of genuine physical terror in that story, which in some ways is more overpowering than the psychological terrors of his other stories. I'm frightened when I read *A Descent into the Maelström*.

*Miller:* Really, you know, I can't get frightened by it—because it seems to me that the one thing Poe doesn't want to do is directly to frighten you. He wants to communicate obliquely what it is to be frightened.

*Bryson:* Let's not get too Aristotelian about this!

*Miller:* Well, yes. And there we come back to the conscious artist. But we have to say that, for Poe, being the conscious artist has its sources not merely in an abstract doctrine but in a living anguish, which is his life; and that by being the conscious artist he transcends or transmutes or escapes from himself. This is the fascination, though I think one is always worried about whether the person who is to be buried, the person who is ultimately to be disposed of, is Roderick Usher or Poe himself. This is really Poe disposing of himself.

*Bryson:* Would Poe's manipulation of his own fate in his imagination seem to you an explanation of the complication, Mr. Early?

*Early:* I think it goes a long way towards reconciling the difficulty in understanding Poe.

*Bryson:* Well, of course, when you find a formula of this kind, which I'm not rejecting at all . . .

*Early:* Oh, I don't want it to be a formula!

*Bryson:* "Formula" is a dirty word; I take it back. But when you find this kind of synthesis you're so grateful for being able to incorporate all the difficulties into one that you may fool yourself a bit. Perhaps human beings as gifted and complex as Poe can't be explained. Would that shock a professor of literature?

*Miller:* It doesn't shock *this* professor, Mr. Bryson. In fact, I find that it keeps up my interest in Poe. If I could explain him ultimately, I shouldn't be interested in him any more.

*Early:* A sense of humility in dealing with Poe, rejecting any of the number of rather facile explanations, is perhaps what we need more than anything else.

*Bryson:* Of course it also gives the best excuse in the world for his very magnificent art, because if you can't understand a man, then it's the man's business to give you a world that you *can* understand.

*Miller:* And even when his art is not magnificent—and sometimes it isn't—it still keeps up the interest.

*Bryson:* It's magnificent enough to keep him alive as a great writer, though.

# SAMUEL BUTLER

## *Erewhon*

(As broadcast August 5, 1956)

JAMES K. FEIBLEMAN • ERIC LARRABEE • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: In spite of the charm and imagination of this book, it was a very long time getting started. I suppose few books of its importance ever had such a tardy recognition.

*Feibleman*: But it did have an immediate financial success, I think. It did sell.

*Bryson*: Well, at the beginning. As Butler himself said in his usual sardonic way, "As soon as they found out that I'm the fellow who wrote it they dropped the book, since I was a person of no consequence."

*Feibleman*: I think the reason the book had a hard time finding its permanent place—and I think it *has* a permanent place as one of the great central books—is because of its ambivalence. Butler tried to do two things in it: he tried to write a satire and he also tried to create a utopia; he mixed the two elements up in a way which makes it more fascinating, I think, than either would have been alone.

*Bryson*: You don't think that spoils the book?

*Feibleman*: Not at all. I think it makes it a rich and thick book.

*Larrabee*: If anything, it is improved by the fact that he couldn't quite make up his mind what he was doing. I should suppose we read it now largely for the satire. We get the greatest exhilaration out of his dexterity in taking the values of the society in which he lived and flipping them over, or turning them upside-down. *Erewhon* certainly holds a mirror up to life, in the sense that the image is reversed. And when he describes the ideas of these strange people living in some kind of Shangri-La valley in the back country of New Zealand, beliefs which are so sharply counter to what the narrator pretends are his own, we get a nice satisfying jar from the shock.

*Bryson*: You know, that surprises me a bit. If you mix satire with utopia, and the satire is about a recent phase of Western life that we know very well—because, after all, he's making fun of nineteenth-century England—it's surprising that the satire holds up. We think we're very different from the Victorians. Perhaps he was satirizing humanity in general and not merely his own time?

*Larrabee*: It's vigorous and strong enough to bear up even now. You can't read it without a shock. For example, there is his great dislike of people who are sick or poor.

*Bryson*: Would you say that again? A *dislike* of people who are sick or poor?

*Larrabee*: A real dislike. The Erewhonians, among their other curious ideas, hold that people should be punished for being unlucky.

You don't quite believe, as you go along, that Butler can really mean this, but gradually it begins to dawn on you that that is what he thinks.

*Feibleman*: He's put the Erewhonians, these strange people who are, as you say, nineteenth-century Englishmen in reverse—he's put them in the back country of New Zealand because, for one reason, that was all his early life; that's where he spent his youth, on a sheep station. And the other reason, I think, is that he wanted to put this society in a natural setting so that he could show the things that he thought were good and bad about human life. The things that he thought were bad were not only poverty and illness, but also machines and institutions and any kind of human sham or pretense or hypocrisy. I think all that is very well set off by the natural setting which came out of his early years in New Zealand.

*Bryson*: Does the beginning work for you, Mr. Feibleman? Of course, his description of these mountains and valleys in New Zealand is tremendously impressive, because the man was a great writer. His style is very direct, very cutting and, at the same time, very picturesque. After all, he once wanted to be a painter. But does it work for you? Do you feel that this very natural and very convincing landscape is a place where you could find this strange country, if you just went over the mountain?

*Feibleman*: Yes, I think that's what ties the book together. Mr. Larrabee mentioned the satire and the utopian elements, but both of them show up *after* the hero of this book gets over the mountains. And the hero, I think, is Butler in his youth, when he was strong and young and handsome.

*Bryson*: And could afford to think that poverty and illness were a bore.

*Feibleman*: That's right. When he was setting out to make his fortune on a New Zealand sheep station. And the first six chapters of the book, which have neither utopian ideas nor satire in them but are purely a description of the beauties of the New Zealand landscape . . .

*Bryson*: With some adventure.

*Feibleman*: It's a bit of an adventure story at first, before it turns into the other two things. But in those first six chapters, it seems to me, he not only describes the New Zealand of his youth but gives you the central scene of the book. He's going to erect his utopia and write his satire against a natural background, and he's going to do it for one big reason: because all natural things are good for him and all unnatural things are bad. The good things for man are health and common sense and instinct and good luck.

*Larrabee*: And he's very successful, too, at setting you down in a real place to start with, and then leading you up into this cloudy, misty, quite unreal mountain pass where you suddenly come on a group of stone statues that are really giant wind whistles.

*Bryson*: To keep people out.

*Larrabee*: To scare away the other New Zealanders. And then,

appropriately enough, the music the statues are playing turns out to be very like Butler's own favorite Handel.

*Bryson*: He's scared but he goes on anyway.

*Larrabee*: This is the transition passage. You have been led up into something mysterious and you expect a strange landscape on the other side of the mountain when you go down.

*Bryson*: And then this adventure story suddenly turns into something else. It turns into a combination of satire and utopia, and all kinds of strange reversals—I think that's your word, Mr. Larrabee—take place here, the main one being that it's wicked to be unlucky.

*Feibleman*: Well, I think a lot of this can be read as autobiography—unintentional, inadvertent autobiography. For instance, Butler's respect for money. Poverty, as Mr. Larrabee pointed out, he sees as an error. And it was an error to him because in his life he didn't commit it. He made an awful lot of money when he was young, and went back to London and wrote *Erewhon* at his leisure. He was able to do this because he was lucky and partly, I guess, because he was healthy and intelligent. He had all these virtues as a young man.

*Bryson*: Does he think, to go back to a very old theme in Western thought, that if you are unlucky it's because you're wicked and you're being punished for your sin? Or is his idea something a little deeper or perhaps not so deep as that?

*Feibleman*: In part, it might be a criticism of the modern conception of a self-made man. The self-made man is the man who's done it against natural forces.

*Bryson*: That's *our* idea.

*Feibleman*: That's our idea. But his idea—it's more realistic, I think—is that better than a self-made man is a man made by nature.

*Larrabee*: And you sense here, again, some of Butler's own ambiguous feelings about success. He was under great pressure as a young man to be a success; he wanted to show his father that he was just as good as *he* had been.

*Bryson*: He never forgets that father.

*Larrabee*: No, he doesn't. And his misfortune, I think—this may have been part of his nature—was to choose avenues of success in which he was bound not to do very well. He drove himself into trying to be the things that he couldn't be, trying to be a composer, trying to be a painter—and when he did make his success with this book, it was almost with the back of his hand. It was suggested by friends that he ought to work up his notes.

*Bryson*: He made money over the back of his hand, too. He went out very young and cleaned up in the sheep business and came back with a small fortune.

*Feibleman*: But this wasn't real success.

*Bryson*: Not to him, no.

*Feibleman*: But to go back to the ideas of the Erewhonians about what is lucky or unlucky: he draws this further, so that it becomes unlucky to want to do those things of which the British society of his time disapproved. It's a piece of misfortune that you should want to sin. The head of one of the families that he meets in Erewhon, the

Nosnibors, has had the misfortune recently to suffer "a severe case of embezzlement."

*Bryson*: That doesn't mean he was the victim, either; he was the perpetrator.

*Feibleman*: Why is it, do you suppose, that in nineteenth-century England—I was thinking of this book and also of Gilbert and Sullivan—it was always necessary to disguise social planning as fiction?

*Bryson*: Nobody would read you unless you made it entertaining.

*Feibleman*: That's probably right. The criticism has to be concealed in comedy in order to survive.

*Bryson*: I think the only difference between then and now is that many of today's social critics are comic but don't know it.

*Feibleman*: This is deliberate comedy, though.

*Bryson*: Yes, this was deliberate.

*Larrabee*: And they could read you as they read Butler, laugh, and go on to something else.

*Bryson*: Or go on in the same old way without being changed a bit. But what are these reversals? We've mentioned one: he said that illness is a crime and that crime itself is an illness. When you got sick you were put in jail, but if you committed a crime the doctor was called in to cure you of your crime.

*Larrabee*: That's one reversal, yes.

*Bryson*: And then comes one of his anticipations, where people who have got into trouble by showing criminal tendencies are treated by a "straightener."

*Feibleman*: Yes. The "straightener," I suppose, is really the psychoanalyst in our society. And he has a lot of respect for these straighteners.

*Bryson*: But he doesn't believe in doctors. They can only practice in secret.

*Feibleman*: One wonders why the doctors are there. After all, it's an imaginary society—if Butler didn't want them there, they wouldn't have been around.

*Bryson*: Ah, but illness was there, and he didn't want that either.

*Feibleman*: You must have whipping boys in your ideal society, and the doctors existed for that purpose; they existed *sub rosa*. You are told that they are disreputable, not to be trusted. The straightener is not only someone admired, but one that you meet in particular is described as a lean, cadaverous, dark-suited man who arrives and prescribes for Mr. Nosnibor a regimen of bread and water, floggings, and similar discomforts. This is immediately accepted by the patient, who can be heard by his family suffering the penalties of his treatment.

*Bryson*: Not penalties, remedies.

*Larrabee*: Butler allows you to catch the echo of the pain suffered by the patients of incompetent doctors, and he lets you feel that, after all, this straightener is so like a doctor that he is making the patient suffer.

*Feibleman*: The name of the patient, the chief character other than the hero who goes to Erewhon, is Senoj Nosnibor, which is really

Jones Robinson spelled backwards. That's a key to you to look in everything for its reversal.

*Bryson*: Well, what about the more elaborate and, to me, less vivid machinery of the rest of it? Remember that when the Erewhonians first find our hero, they're very nice to him and he thinks they're wonderful and beautiful and kindly people. But they discover a watch on him and that immediately gets him into trouble. They practically throw him into prison because he has a watch.

*Larrabee*: And he is puzzled by this, as he is puzzled by the lack of sympathy for him when he has a slight cold. Butler gives you to understand later that his narrator is being led off because he was a stranger and came in from the outside, and, anyhow, the watch would be an appropriate exhibit in their museum of forbidden machinery.

*Bryson*: What was wrong with a watch?

*Larrabee*: In Erewhon the state had prohibited and destroyed all machinery that had been invented in the last two hundred and seventy-one years. This figure was arrived at after very careful discussion; they had to compromise on two seventy-one because they got into an argument about a laundry device that ladies were using and couldn't quite decide whether it was on the good or the bad side. They finally decided it was bad, and so they barred that too.

*Feibleman*: All machines are Frankenstein monsters to Butler and he's afraid that they're going to take over.

*Bryson*: So he has the Erewhonians smash them up and put all the remnants away in a museum—and that's what happens to the watch. Does this mean that Butler, like most satirists, hated science?

*Feibleman*: No, I think it means that he hated technology and *applied* science. He liked the search for pure knowledge, but he didn't like the idea of taking the applications too far away from human beings and their immediate senses. I think, in other words, that this man is an apostle of common sense . . .

*Bryson*: Common sense, as we would ordinarily use the term, Mr. Feibleman, would be *for* gadgets because they save labor.

*Feibleman*: But not this kind of common sense.

*Bryson*: This is an *uncommon* kind of common sense.

*Feibleman*: This is an instinct for reason that keeps pretty close to the other senses. He thinks that the common kind of common sense, which makes gadgets and labor-saving devices, may lead us in the end to living for the gadgets instead of the other way round.

*Larrabee*: And he cared most of all for what men believe; if machines made it possible for them to believe things that he thought were wrong, or even believe things that he thought were right for the wrong reasons, then he would be against them.

*Feibleman*: I would say he not only cared for what men believed, but I think he cared for men. He's a humanist in the grand sense of the word.

*Bryson*: Of course he is, but he's also a satirist. Doesn't he find even his utopia of Erewhon essentially a bit foolish when he gets into the discussion of Musical Banks?

*Feibleman*: The Musical Banks I had a little trouble with.

These are banks which issue coinage that everybody gives lip service to but nobody actually believes in—and it goes back to Mr. Larrabee's point, I think, that he was concerned with their beliefs.

*Bryson:* And yet they go through all the motions; Mrs. Nosnibor and her daughter go to the Musical Bank and make deposits and draw out . . .

*Feibleman:* Well, lip service is not unheard of in this world.

*Bryson:* No, but this is utopia.

*Larrabee:* But even though they are utopian, they are this human. I think the Musical Banks are his least successful effort to satirize a given institution of his own time. It seemed to me he meant the church by the banks.

*Feibleman:* Yes, I think so.

*Bryson:* He's satirizing organized religion.

*Larrabee:* And he's really speaking of the currency, as you say, of people's ideas. The banks are institutions that formalize a set of beliefs—a set of not really *held* beliefs.

*Feibleman:* It isn't a case, however, of simply being against religious belief, because he says in one place that in the case of religion it's just as bad to deny as to pretend that we know.

*Bryson:* He isn't against belief at all, but he's against organized belief, and doesn't that go back to your point, Mr. Feibleman, that he's against institutions?

*Feibleman:* Yes, I think so. He makes the mistake of identifying the bad things that some institutions do with the institutions themselves, so that institutions become bad things.

*Bryson:* All institutions?

*Feibleman:* All institutions. He's against them. He thinks that we can get along without them and that there can be human relations and achievements without them, which I think is quite wrong.

*Bryson:* It's an error made by satirists.

*Feibleman:* But really, you know, what he's against is false knowledge, and there are three places where it's exhibited in this book: one, in the British society he's satirizing; two, in the utopia itself; and three, in the beliefs of the hero.

*Bryson:* Who is Butler himself when young.

*Larrabee:* And the Butler you see is presented as a rather naïvely pious young man who takes quite at face value the British ideas of the time. He expresses shocked disapproval that the Erewhonians should hold such ridiculous ideas, thinks always of the great potentialities of Christianizing and colonizing this hitherto undiscovered land, and ends up proposing that a gunboat be secured and that the normal processes of imperial conquest proceed.

*Feibleman:* Evidently Butler thinks that when he was young he was pious, conventional, naïve, sweet, and conservative. He developed the sweetness into a sort of double-edged thing, a wiser sweetness—because it evolved into a kindly and humorous way of showing how life could be better. I think that's what he meant to do in this book.

*Bryson:* This is a very earnest book, besides being an extremely entertaining one and a lot of fun to read. In a sense this man was



writing a pamphlet; he really wanted to do something to the late Victorian mind. Did he do it?

*Feibleman*: I don't think he did it in his day, but very few great geniuses do. You know, he warned about geniuses: he said it's an offense to be a genius; genius must come through somebody, but woe to the man through whom it comes. This is a story of his own fate, I think. But the book is becoming recognized and its values may, in the end, have achieved something. We don't quite know the way in which great books like this achieve their effect, anyhow.

*Larrabee*: E. M. Forster speaks somewhere of those books that really change your mind, and says they have the quality that *Erewhon* has: while reading it you keep thinking "I could have written that if I hadn't been so busy." And he speaks of it as one of those rather light books that have a very deep effect, although you may not notice it at the time.

*Feibleman*: It's painless learning to read this book.

*Bryson*: One reason why he thought geniuses were unfortunate is that he himself was completely badgered by his plenitude of gifts. The man could do so many things: he could paint pretty well, he was pretty good at music, he could write beautifully but didn't really care very much about that, he chased around trying to prove that Darwin was wrong and that Homer was a woman, and all kinds of things. Why did he waste such a tremendous intelligence on such trivial ideas? I don't mean in this book, but in general.

*Feibleman*: I don't know the answer to that. I have the feeling sometimes that he was a man ill-served by his time and, great as his gifts were, he couldn't put them to work—at least he couldn't put them to work in a way that both satisfied him and produced the kind of *succès d'estime* that he really wanted.

*Bryson*: Isn't that the worst thing you could say about the society in which he lived, that it couldn't use a man like Butler?

*Larrabee*: Yes, but it may have been a little his fault. Quite a lot, perhaps. Aren't you asking for too much?

*Bryson*: Why not? Let's follow Butler; *he* asked for too much.

*Feibleman*: He did ask for too much. But I think it's enough, really, that a man have genius and that he be economical about it, using it only in a direction in which it can be used successfully. I don't think he knew this was his big book.

*Bryson*: But he says genius is a misfortune, and with him it *was* a misfortune—because the one thing that really expressed his genius was the thing he cared the least about, his book.

*Larrabee*: Yes. This book, done when he would much rather have been exhibiting paintings, made him famous. It was a kind of fame that he, as he grew older, thought less and less of, as he thought less and less of the book and began to detest the reputation that it had given him.

*Feibleman*: You said he wanted to be a painter. I think his painter's eye is responsible for some of the literary quality of this book, not only in the extraordinary beautiful passages in the first six chapters in which he takes the young hero out of the New Zealand sheep

station and into Erewhon, but also throughout the remainder in some of the images he uses—for instance, in that passage in which he points out how men go through life backward. He said that living is being drawn through life backwards: you can see where you've been but you can't see where you're going.

*Bryson*: Which is related to that extraordinary passage about the unborn insisting upon being born.

*Feibleman*: There he's touching on something pretty important—that people are concerned with where they're going after this life, but they don't think that any light can be thrown on it by looking at where they've been.

*Larrabee*: And he believes that the mere act of being born is an aggressive one, for which the individual must bear responsibility.

*Bryson*: And if you're unfortunate, he asks, why did you get yourself born? You didn't need to.

*Feibleman*: Some primitive people do that: they rejoice at the death and grieve at the birth, and they say this is the way you must regard life.

*Bryson*: But that is so much more profoundly, shall I say, bitter. Most of this book is rather light satire, really good-humored satire, but at this one point he gets down and puts the grit into it as the great satirists have done. Why in this one spot does he do that, I wonder?

*Feibleman*: Oh, I don't think that he does it in only one spot! I agree with Mr. Larrabee that all through this book the treatment is light but the ideas are profound.

*Larrabee*: And this is close to where Butler's heart was. His own relationship with his father had so seared him that any mention of the idea of paternity set his interior machinery jangling; his attitudes towards birth show the whole set of his own feelings about what it is to be in a family and what it is to be a father or to be a son.

*Bryson*: Which, of course, came out in his great novel.

*Larrabee*: Yes, *The Way of All Flesh*.

*Bryson*: Is this book, *Erewhon*, just a curiosity from late Victorian literature that one admires because a great virtuoso did it, or is it a modern book?

*Larrabee*: Mr. Feibleman spoke earlier of his extraordinary anticipations. There are a good many. Not only does he anticipate the psychoanalyst, but there are those long quotes from this hypothetical *Book of the Machines* in which he discusses the ability of machinery to take over mankind; there's much of automation in this, and much feeling of dissatisfaction with Darwin. When he described a natural evolution of machinery, it is partly a satire on the evolution of man.

*Feibleman*: Yes, he anticipated a lot of things. There are the "straighteners," who are really psychoanalysts; the thinking machines, which are really our digital computers; the unconscious memory of vegetables, which goes a little far but is certainly Jungian; and one that we haven't mentioned which I think is awfully important, that belief can be probable. It doesn't have to be certain—you can have probabilistic beliefs.

*Bryson*: And you modern philosophers accept that, do you?

*Feibleman*: Well, some of us do—the more modest, I think, which are the rare ones. Philosophers don't much run to modesty, if you look at the history of philosophy. But I think the modest ones will admit that they can be wrong as well as anyone else, and that beliefs can be acted on without their having to be absolutely certain.

*Bryson*: As in any other great book, there's an enormous amount of material and ideas here in embryo—and we, as time goes on, discover more and more of them, which may explain our first point, Mr. Feibleman: the book took a long time to get started because it took people a long time to find out what was in it.

## ARISTOPHANES

### *The Frogs*

(As broadcast August 12, 1956)

MOSES HADAS • ANDRE MICHALOPOULOS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: Aristophanes created a good many strange landscapes. In this particular case the landscape he created was hell, but it's not the kind of hell that I think I would recognize if I got there.

*Hadas*: No, it's an imaginary one, with enough reality, I suppose, to be recognizable to Aristophanes's contemporaries. His hell is a sort of halfway house, between the hell of Homer in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey* and the hell that Virgil put in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, the one from which Dante learned so much.

*Bryson*: But Aristophanes wasn't after anything that would frighten you, or even touch you the way Virgil and Dante did. He wanted to make something funny.

*Hadas*: I think that the incongruity of going down to hell in order to fetch a poet is in itself funny.

*Bryson*: Where would you go for a poet? To heaven?

*Hadas*: Oh, I don't know that heaven would be a better place, but I'd look for a living poet, probably, and not a dead one.

*Michalopoulos*: I don't think it is what you could call a typical Greek hell; it's more a creation of Aristophanes on vague Greek grounds. It is a far cry from the shadowy hell of Homer, as you've already said, and I don't think there's any very definite sense of retribution or of sin.

*Bryson*: That might have spoiled it for fun. But where does Aristophanes belong, anyway, in the history of humor? Did the Greeks before Aristophanes know how to be as funny as he was?

*Hadas*: I think people have always known how to be funny, and I think the laws of humor are valid through eternity. The same kinds of things are always funny. You can list all of the things that have

ever made people laugh: sex jokes, physiological jokes, dialect jokes, anything—they're all here in Aristophanes, every one of them. They're systematized, more or less. I think this man knew what he was doing, and I would say the common denominator for all of the jokes in Aristophanes is incongruity. His wit is intellectual. He is always hitting you in the head. He is not trying to engage your sympathy or your emotions, as, let's say, Cervantes is doing when he's talking about Don Quixote. There you're sorry for the old man; you want to raise your hand and protect him when they keep beating the fellow. Aristophanes is more like Rabelais; you never feel sorry for Gargantua or Pantagruel.

*Bryson:* A little envious sometimes!

*Hadas:* They're not human enough. Those characters are just a great intellectual joke.

*Michalopoulos:* They're certainly very human in Aristophanes. First of all, you have the god Dionysus going down to hell disguised as Hercules and accompanied by a slave. His disguise is a very thin one, because under the lion's mane and in spite of the club that he's holding, he's wearing his saffron robe as the god of wine.

*Hadas:* Quite like a football player with a bit of lace showing underneath his football togs.

*Michalopoulos:* There's a lot of horseplay between Dionysus and the slave. And when things get a little terrifying, Dionysus wants the slave, Xanthias, to take his part as Hercules.

*Bryson:* Even before you put Dionysus into the costume of the great muscular hero, there's an initial incongruity—that a god, even though he is an effeminate god, as Dionysus was to the Greeks, should go down to hell looking for a poet.

*Hadas:* I think the real function of setting this play in hell is one that's in keeping with this entire series of discussions. Any thinker who is trying to examine the nature of human relationships, whether in poetry or in politics or in teaching or in literature, had best do the thing that this man is doing. This is a scientific investigation, I believe, though not quite as clearly so as *The Birds*.

*Bryson:* Do you mean a scientific investigation for Aristophanes or for Dionysus?

*Hadas:* I mean for us. What we're given is a rigged field, one which is deliberately chosen by the experimenter. He creates a setting and introduces his actors, his subjects, under more or less controlled conditions. You can see with a kind of detachment, just as you could in Utopia or in any other land of fantasy, what's going to happen. I think this has a scientific basis to it. In a sense, it's research as a sociologist or an anthropologist might carry it out.

*Michalopoulos:* Yes, I agree, but there's also a thoroughly practical reason for this. The Athenian audience, which was a pretty intellectual audience, had been sitting through five or six, maybe more, gruesome and tragic plays.

*Bryson:* In what period of time—several days? If it was one of these great religious festivals, it lasted several days.

*Michalopoulos:* Two or three days. But they'd sit through all

this, and they'd get tense and anguished. They took these plays very seriously. And then the comedy came, with serious content but as a relaxation. So that all the horseplay has its purpose and its function.

*Bryson*: And the horseplay is *really* horseplay. There are many things said and done on the Greek stage that we couldn't do in our theatre. We'd consider them too obscene.

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, there are some things that are obscene, but there are some that are just funny; they're clowning, and very good clowning too.

*Hadas*: I think we have to remember that here is Dionysus's day. The thing that's always struck me is that Greek literature should be as pure as it is—it's absolutely Victorian. The tragedians are, the historians are; there's very, very seldom anything that would offend even the most squeamish Victorian taste. Suddenly you get into a play like this, which is bawdy in most heroic terms. You can't imagine anything bawdier than this thing is. It is a function of the Dionysiac. I think the Mediterranean peoples understand this—that you occasionally need a festival, a kind of carnival, as a release. This is brought out so well in the *Bacchae* of Euripides—if you're going to try to be a Paulinist for three hundred sixty-five days of the year, the bad element in you is going to corrupt all the rest; you'll never be quite healthy. The thing to do is to give two or three days of the year to Dionysus; you get rid of all of this, you have a jolly good time, and for the remainder of the year you can stay as pure as a Victorian. These things won't bother you any more.

*Bryson*: I think that was rediscovered by Freud about twenty-five hundred years later.

*Hadas*: Another point about the audience interests me. Read all of the books about how brilliant these Greeks were, how well-educated they were. At no other time, I think, in human history has an author of a popular work, with the entire community in attendance, demanded so much of his audience. These people obviously knew all of tragedy by heart; they could get all of Aristophanes's allusions, they could recognize his clarities. I think this is most extraordinary for the man who is not trying to be a classic. You see, the tragedians *were* trying to be classics. They knew that they were going to live forever.

*Bryson*: While Aristophanes is just trying to be funny.

*Hadas*: He's trying to be absolutely funny. I think nobody would be more surprised than he to find us here, talking about him, so many years later.

*Michalopoulos*: I agree absolutely. And it's all the more remarkable when you see all the allusions that occur in Aristophanes to poets of generations preceding his, apart from the allusions to contemporary poets.

*Hadas*: He expects the audience to know everything by heart.

*Bryson*: But what happens when Dionysus goes to hell looking for a poet?

*Hadas*: Well, you see, the rules have been suspended. Here's a man who creates a new world, a utopia, a fantasy, and nothing that you ordinarily know applies any more. The law of gravity is out; Lord

Boyle's law is out; Gresham's law is out. All the laws that we know are out, and we have a clean slate. I think this is the program for practically every one of his comedies. Now let's see what happens when we lose the prejudices that we bring with us.

*Michalopoulos*: And so Dionysus arrives in hell, where he finds Aeschylus and Euripides.

*Bryson*: Two dead poets of great stature.

*Michalopoulos*: Two dead poets, one dead more than a generation, maybe two. Euripides had very recently died, but Aeschylus died before Aristophanes was born. And these two are going to have a contest as to who should be allowed to sit next to Pluto, the king of the Underworld. So this contest begins, and it's an extremely interesting one. Aristophanes proceeds to ridicule the foibles and the weaknesses of both poets, and imitates their style magnificently.

*Hadas*: I think an interesting point is that you have got in this play, actually, the first honest literary criticism. This is another invention. There *were* other literary critics, let's say Plato, who talked about poetry only from the point of view of whether or not it makes good citizens. But here's a man who is actually looking at the bricks and mortar of poetry, at the meter, the syntax, the imagination. The things that make up the line-by-line criticism of poetry. After you have weighed these lines, after you've ridiculed the commonplaceness of Euripidean diction as against the grandeur of Aeschylus's, you finally come up with a political question. You like one, you like the other; you can't make up your mind. So you pose a problem: what shall we do about Alcibiades?

*Bryson*: And this is contemporary politics.

*Hadas*: This is absolutely contemporary. We're going to give the Chair of Poetry to the man who can help us in our present political dilemma.

*Bryson*: Does that mean that Aristophanes considers the purely esthetic criticism of these two great dramatists unimportant as compared with the moral question? That sounds very much as if he'd gone right back to the Platonic position: we will give the Chair of Poetry to the man who can help us handle this obstreperous young villain, Alcibiades.

*Hadas*: But meanwhile you have a more logical basis for criticism. You're not merely saying "this does something to me" or "I like this." You have actually weighed these poets on their merits; you've found flaws in both, because I think it's a mistake to say that he lambastes Euripides and worships Aeschylus. Aeschylus gets almost as many hard knocks as Euripides does.

*Bryson*: And much of this was new in Greek literature?

*Hadas*: The criticism was, yes. Technical criticism does not exist before this. I think people themselves were judges—they always have been. But to come out and say "This is good because the meter is so-and-so or the songs are so-and-so" is something quite new.

*Michalopoulos*: You say he lambastes Aeschylus almost as much. I think not quite as much. I think he tips the scales a little in favor of him.

*Bryson*: However you're not objecting to that, Mr. Michalopoulos?

*Michalopoulos*: No, I'm not, because I'm not a Euripidean. I must acknowledge that he wrote some very fine things, but I object to him on political grounds, too. And this brings us to something one mustn't forget: that the Greek tragedians were teachers.

*Hadas*: Oh, there's a famous line in *The Frogs* itself: "Boys at schools have a master to teach them; we poets are the teachers of men." The poet is a very important figure, with a brief, let's say, to teach. He is not merely entertaining.

*Michalopoulos*: Now Aeschylus is a conservative teacher. He represents the old training, the old ideas, the established ideas, and Aristophanes is obviously a very conservative man.

*Bryson*: Like most satirists.

*Hadas*: Well, maybe because it's simply easier to make fun. If you want to be funny, it may be easier to make fun of the novel, the new, than of the old-fashioned. You've got a great body of opinion on your side, to begin with.

*Michalopoulos*: Euripides represented a lot of newfangled ideas to Aristophanes and they lived in a very difficult time. I feel that the life of Aristophanes resembles a little the lives which we have lived in point of the times we've gone through. After all, I think all of us knew the world before World War I . . .

*Bryson*: At least I thought I did.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, I thought I did too. When I was a boy, I once asked my father whether Greece would ever be invaded again, and he said "Don't be silly, my boy, we're living in the twentieth century." Well, how wrong he was. Aristophanes was born in the great Periclean age when everybody was hopeful for the future, when people were encouraged to initiative and individual thought for the benefit of the city. And then comes the Peloponnesian War and the death of Pericles—which was a disaster for Athens, because I think he probably would have managed things better. This war went on for twenty-seven years, I think it was, and ended in the destruction of the city. And when he makes fun of Socrates in *The Clouds*, which was written in 423 B.C., it was still horseplay, it was still a joke. But what was a joke in 423 was a very serious matter by 405; things had become tense . . .

*Bryson*: And he was in a city over which defeat was hanging.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, was impending. And that is why a battle like Arginusae, which happened about six months before this play was written, was very important. Athens had won a great naval victory, and then had marred it all by executing the generals who won that victory. But how did we get on this side excursion into Greek history?

*Bryson*: Well, we were trying to make a comparison between his times and ours.

*Michalopoulos*: No, no—we were on the matter of the criticism between Aeschylus and Euripides. I feel that it goes beyond literary criticism, that it is political criticism too.

*Hadas*: I don't think that Aristophanes or any other Greek would

divorce the two and classify them. The thing hangs together. The poet is not merely a maker of pretty things for relaxation, but a teacher who has responsibility to the community. A man may make a piece of furniture that's beautiful, but he's also making a commodity for use, and the use is total use.

*Michalopoulos*: Exactly.

*Bryson*: But aren't we getting away from the fact that Aristophanes, as we ourselves said, was primarily trying to be entertaining? Does this more serious purpose in any way impede or hold back the humor?

*Michalopoulos*: No, I think it enhances it. And the people of Athens were so pleased with what he gave them that they asked him to repeat the performance two or three days afterwards, and crowned him with the olive—a thing that had never been done before. And they were pleased with the play not only because of the fun which they had had, but because of its patriotic nature.

*Hadas*: I think we're all forgetting one thing: we're being very modern in taking this man by sections. Clearly, we aren't Greeks.

*Bryson*: Even Mr. Michalopoulos?

*Hadas*: Even Mr. Michalopoulos is a corrupted Greek. He's been corrupted by two millennia of something else. But don't you see, we insist on our classifications; if a man is going to be serious, well then let him *be* serious; if he's going to be playful, let him be playful. The Romans had a nice expression: "Who forbids you to tell the truth with a smile?" But the too-agile mind puzzles us, the mind that can be as serious as all get out—a great patriot, deeply concerned for the future of the country, the future of poetry, the future of education—and still be able to laugh about it.

*Bryson*: Perhaps that's what disturbs us about Bernard Shaw.

*Hadas*: And it's why the Mediterranean peoples can be very devout and still laugh in church, though it horrifies us.

*Michalopoulos*: I entirely agree with what you've just said . . .

*Bryson*: Your Mediterranean spirit is there, we know, Mr. Michalopoulos.

*Michalopoulos*: And that is why I completely appreciate the bawdy passages of Aristophanes and wish they could be extended to a wider audience. It's like the Scotsman's definition of love, which is extraordinarily funny but I can't tell it to you gentlemen if this conversation is to remain on the air.

*Bryson*: Because Puritanism, somehow, has made lightness of manner impossible. Still it is somewhat more admired by some modern people than we seem to admit.

*Hadas*: But we divide ourselves up too much! Here's a total man, here's one man. We have the same difficulty with Aristophanes, with Euripides, and with Plato. The modern reader will insist that *The Republic* is either a blueprint for a new form of government or else it's completely funny: "Now tell us, Plato, which do you mean to be?" And of course Plato couldn't. Nobody could.

*Michalopoulos*: He is a universal man.

*Hadas*: And so was Aristophanes. But we wonder why this man,



who was a profound reformer in politics and an exquisite lyric poet, should, in Victorian terms at least, soil himself with obscenity. But he isn't soiling himself; this is *one* man. And I think that if we want to extract one lesson from Aristophanes, it would be the lesson of the total man, who has so much piety for the important things that he can smile about them. I think that's real piety.

*Michalopoulos*: You know what Havelock Ellis said: he said that all great men are obscene.

*Bryson*: Well, all men are obscene in the sense that Mr. Hadas has been explaining, but the great men don't try to deceive us about it. It's only the little man who tries to pretend that he doesn't have a body.

*Michalopoulos*: What has happened is that in the Middle Ages you had that unnatural elevation of woman by chivalry, and at the same time the debasement of woman by monasticism.

*Bryson*: They go together.

*Michalopoulos*: And after that you had the perversion of normal relations between the sexes by Puritanism.

*Bryson*: Of course, there's more than sexual obscenity in Aristophanes; there's what one might call little-boy obscenity—the sort of thing little boys write on billboards.

*Hadas*: Well, it's at every possible level. There's just no kind of obscene joke which does not somewhere occur in Aristophanes.

*Bryson*: But let me ask you two gentlemen, who are both so familiar with the Greeks, something else: did these jokes keep the Greeks from seeing how sad, how serious, how disturbed Aristophanes really was?

*Michalopoulos*: No, they did not.

*Hadas*: I think that the Greeks were like himself; he was a little more articulate than some of the others, perhaps, but he was talking to people who were like himself.

*Michalopoulos*: And who understood him perfectly.

*Hadas*: All of this may not apply to *The Frogs*, because that deals with literature. But *Lysistrata*, which is usually thought of as the most outspokenly obscene of all, is one of the saddest plays I know. Here is a man so disheartened by the political folly of the time that he can think of no reasonable cure at all, and so we have a fantastic thing like this sex-strike being suggested as a remedy for the situation.

*Michalopoulos*: That play is dripping with tears. But the sadness occurs here in *The Frogs*, too.

*Hadas*: Yes, it does.

*Michalopoulos*: I have a passage that I'd like to read. This is in Rogers's translation:

*Often it has crossed my fancy, that the city loves to deal  
With the very best and noblest members of her commonweal,  
Just as with our ancient coinage, and the newly-minted gold.  
Yea for these, our sterling pieces, all of pure Athenian  
mould,  
All of perfect die and metal, all the fairest of the fair,*

*All of workmanship unequalled, proved and valued every-  
 where  
 Both amongst our own Hellenes and Barbarians far away,  
 These we use not: but the worthless pinchbeck coins of  
 yesterday,  
 Vilest die and basest metal, now we always use instead.  
 Even so, our sterling townsmen, nobly born and nobly bred,  
 Men of worth and rank and mettle, men of honorable fame,  
 Trained in every liberal science, choral dance and manly  
 game,  
 These we treat with scorn and insult, but the strangers  
 newliest come,  
 Worthless sons of worthless fathers, pinchbeck townsmen,  
 yellowy scum,  
 Whom in earlier days the city hardly would have stooped to  
 use,  
 Even for her scapegoat victims, these for every task we  
 choose.  
 O unwise and foolish people . . .*

Now, that is what rang a chord in the hearts of the Athenians.

*Bryson:* In this passage you get some suggestion of a third quality in him—not only his serious purpose, his pedagogical purpose, or the humor, the clowning and obscenity he used, but also the extraordinary lyric power which this man evidently had.

*Hadas:* Oh, I think he was one of the greatest lyric poets the world has seen! I think I'd go back to *The Birds* for some of the more beautiful lyrics; they're perfectly wonderful. As for the conservatism Mr. Michalopoulos praises, there were a great many Athenians who would agree with him; on the other hand, they voted for the other side.

*Michalopoulos:* And in these plays there's a sadness for things that are going badly. It reminds one of Sophocles, who shared this feeling in his old age. In *Oedipus at Colonus* he says: "Faith dies and unfaith blossoms like a flower. There is no constancy 'twixt friend and friend or city and city." Now Sophocles had died just a little time before. And there was this general feeling in Athens that all the good days were gone, a sort of hopelessness, which is a very sad thing. And that sadness comes out there.

*Hadas:* But I think the *Oedipus* is hopeful at the end, and I think that Aristophanes on the whole is hopeful too. As long as people can laugh this way, they can hope.

*Bryson:* And isn't it a bit startling that at a time when Athens was in danger of going to pieces—as she actually did, not so long after that—she seemed to blossom forth in all of these men who could express what was happening as nobody else ever had and even point out what *should* happen, although it was too late to do anything about it.

# KENNETH GRAHAME

## *The Wind in the Willows*

(As broadcast August 19, 1956)

EDWARD DAVISON • VIRGILIA PETERSON • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* The strange landscape of Kenneth Grahame, at least in *The Wind in the Willows*, is a landscape seen through the eyes of little animals, animals of the fields and of the rivers. As a matter of fact, it is a book, I suppose, *about* animals.

*Davison:* I think it's about some other things too. Perhaps even before it's about animals it's about a certain kind of experience that *people* have, rather than animals. I don't mean that the animals are necessarily humanized, I don't think there's anything anthropomorphic about it. But it's the experience that seems to me to be the important thing in this book, the experiences that the young of all ages always enjoy and remember and understand when they happen to their own children or to their children's children—things like running away, things like a picnic on the river on a spring day, or things that we've read about a hundred times and have always wanted to participate in.

*Peterson:* It's not about animals as such, but about animals with human characteristics. At the same time, it doesn't satirize human beings in any way; these are animals with personalities, very three-dimensional personalities of their own. There's a mole and a water rat and a toad and a badger and an otter and a baby otter; all of them are real people, though not necessarily what we think moles, badgers, and toads are like.

*Bryson:* The mole, in the beginning, is just Mole; he's not any one of the moles that are burrowing around in the ground, he's *Mole*. He meets a water rat, and he's just Water Rat, or Ratty. Then there's a badger, and he's just Badger; and there's a toad—and he's just Toad. But it's not a world full of toads and moles and badgers; it's a strange world in which most of the animals seem to be quite alone as characters.

*Peterson:* They're all bachelors, too.

*Davison:* Yes, no wives and families. They have their own houses and do their own housekeeping. It's true that there are a few peripheral characters in the book who seem to come from some form of married life. You have the two young hedgehogs who are eating their breakfast on a snowy day in Mr. Badger's house. And then, of course, you have the field mice who sing the wonderful carol outside Mole's house at Christmas; they have little mufflers round their necks and they've obviously come from good homes, where they're being taken considerable care of. But the main characters, oddly enough, are all bachelors, and there's no suggestion at any time that they've ever been married or even been in love with anybody.

*Peterson:* The danger of talking about these characters is that it sounds like Ruskin's pathetic fallacy. And yet it is not. It is not a question of putting human emotions into nature. These are just people of character who happen to be animals.

*Bryson:* It's just on that account that I spoke of them as being *individuals* rather than representatives of a kind. Nor are these like La Fontaine's animals, each of whom simply represents a human vice or a human virtue. These are three-dimensional characters. When little Mole comes up out of his house in the springtime—well, even more when Mole has lived for some years, some indefinite time . . .

*Peterson:* Some seasons.

*Bryson:* . . . some reasons with Water Rat because it's so much nicer in Water Rat's hole—I suppose in American terms Water Rat would be a muskrat, wouldn't he?

*Davison:* Roughly speaking, yes.

*Bryson:* Well, some time after he has moved in with Ratty, Mole is wandering about in the fields. And he's suddenly struck with a very curious sensation because he smells something that in the beginning he can't quite recognize—and then he realizes it's home, it's his old home.

*Peterson:* Mole tries his best to get rid of the extraordinary wave of nostalgia that sweeps over him, and tries to go on after Rat because they're in a hurry to get home, but finally he sits down and weeps. And when Rat understands—Rat being a master of delicacy in human relations—he says "Oh, by all means, let's go and look at your little home!"

*Bryson:* Rat comes very near being a master of all situations.

*Peterson:* Well, Rat has the most wonderful delicacy. There is a sort of lesson in this book, although it's never sententious and never driven home and there's no moralizing; but there's a reflection of the author's point of view about what constitutes maturity and what constitutes dignity and what are the best human relations.

*Davison:* Yes, you could almost say that it's a kind of primer of good manners. I know of no book which so unobtrusively and unpretentiously shows people how to behave considerately, delicately, and kindly. You may remember that when they go back to Mole's little house there's no food, there's no fuel, the place hasn't been dusted for a long time. Mole is terribly embarrassed, but Rat puts him completely at his ease; he goes out and finds a couple of bottles of beer in the cellar, and it's just the right beer. It's Old Burton beer, which makes excellent mulled ale. But, you know, another thing occurred to me just now as we were saying that none of them had any wives or families. I wonder if you'd agree with me that it's a man's world in this book, isn't it?

*Peterson:* The female is certainly conspicuous by her absence, except where a couple of real women come in, more or less by accident, because they're necessary to the story.

*Bryson:* All of this has a bearing on one question which isn't really worth arguing about, but which has been so often mentioned: is this a children's book or not? It is a children's book—and a lot more. But doesn't it suggest that he's really thinking about a child's interest

when he approaches his characters in this way? This is Mole, not just one among all the other moles in the world, and he doesn't need wife or progeny.

*Davison*: He's like Melchizedek, he's without mother or father. And so is Rat. Just as there's no reference to such a thing as a kiss or to falling in love or to children, so is there no reference to mothers and fathers. Oh, I think once Badger is talking to Toad, and he says: "Your father was a great friend of mine." I just remembered that.

*Bryson*: And it was Badger who said it. Badger is a curious fellow, who was *born* a sort of grandfather.

*Davison*: Yes, he's the senior member of this little company.

*Bryson*: I think Badger is one of the most remarkable characters. There's Mole, a little bit bumptious, timid, sweet; there's Rat, who, as you say, is delicate but at the same time very masterful. Now where does Badger come in?

*Peterson*: Oh, Badger hardly comes in at all. In the beginning they long to see Badger, but he keeps himself to himself and is very hard to court. Finally, Mole is so eager to really get to know him that he starts off in the night by himself for the Wild Wood—about which Rat has not been willing to talk, because Rat has a sort of feeling that it's a pity to spoil the innocence of Mole by talking about them, the others, the ones they fear, the terror. But Badger lives right in the heart of the terror of the Wild Wood.

*Davison*: But *he* needs to be afraid of nobody. The ferrets and the stoats would never make an attack on Badger. He represents strength, experience, wisdom, self-containment. You remember his first appearance? He knocks at the door and comes in and finds Ratty and Mole and Otter all talking together. He just grunts "Oh, company?" and turns round and walks away.

*Peterson*: But in his own house he's extraordinarily hospitable.

*Davison*: Wonderfully hospitable.

*Peterson*: They're rather amazed when Rat rescues Mole and finds in the snow the doorscraper of Badger's house, and they finally get taken in just when they're exhausted.

*Bryson*: Lost in the woods, in the cold and snow.

*Peterson*: Badger shows them the house and is rather philosophical about it, because he explains that it's in the ruins where men used to live. It's an enormous house, with large, imposing rooms and arches and storerooms.

*Bryson*: All underground.

*Peterson*: And he explains: "People come—they stay for a while, they flourish, they build—and they go. It is their way. But we remain. There were badgers here, I've been told, long before that same city ever came to be. And now there are badgers here again. We're an enduring lot . . ."

*Davison*: You see, there's another theme of poetry. It's the same one that you find in *Ozymandias*:

. . . Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

You find theme after theme in this book which is common to lyric poetry throughout the world, without reference to time or place.

*Bryson:* This is a way of characterizing the book. Because it seems to me that what Grahame was doing was singing these basic lyric themes in the lives of these little animals. And somehow he transfigures them into representatives of experience. I wish I knew how many times I've read this book; I know I've twice read it aloud to patient friends and members of my family. Nothing gives me such a sense of spring as little Mole's feeling that he absolutely *must* break through the earth out into the sunshine—he's been down underground too long.

*Peterson:* Oh, the seasons and all of nature are wonderfully described—the Water Rat's love of boats, of messing about . . .

*Davison:* Yes, he says: "Believe me, my young friend, there is *nothing*—absolutely nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. Simply messing."

*Bryson:* But we mustn't leave out Mr. Toad; after all, there was a movie made of this book in which Mr. Toad was the chief character.

*Peterson:* Oh, I never knew that. I thought A. A. Milne wrote a play that was put on in London . . .

*Davison:* They used to do it every year for several years.

*Bryson:* There was a movie, too, and it was mostly about Toad. Now Toad is not a lyric character. He is very much a dramatic character. And when they finally go to see him—but here you have one of the most curious things in the book: somewhere in here you go from these animals living in animal circumstances into a human world. And when we come to Mr. Toad, we find that he lives in what is one of the finest houses on the river. It's a great big brick house with lawns.

*Davison:* And a family estate, which had belonged to his father before him.

*Bryson:* That's right, with a flock of servants.

*Davison:* And beautifully furnished.

*Bryson:* I've often wondered what the servants were. Were they toads?

*Davison:* It doesn't say. I think they were human beings for the most part.

*Peterson:* He's a rich man, and a great egotist with a wonderful sense of adventure. But I think there's an element here which for 1908, when the book was written, was rather a prophecy—because the whole myth of the beauty of automobiles, of speed, and of things on wheels begins in Toad's mind. They start out on an expedition—Rat and the Mole rather reluctantly, but Toad demands it of them—in a sort of gypsy carriage with a rather bored old horse. And then, all of a sudden:

*. . . Far behind them they heard a faint warning hum, like the drone of a distant bee. Glancing back, they saw a small cloud of dust, with a dark centre of energy, advancing on them at incredible speed, while from out the dust a faint*

*"Poop-poop!" wailed like an uneasy animal in pain. Hardly regarding it, they turned to resume their conversation, when in an instant (as it seemed) the peaceful scene was changed, and with a blast of wind and a whirl of sound that made them jump for the nearest ditch, it was on them! The "Poop-poop" rang with a brazen shout in their ears, they had a moment's glimpse of an interior of glittering plate-glass and rich morocco, and the magnificent motor-car, immense, breath-snatching, passionate, with its pilot tense and hugging his wheel, possessed all earth and air for the fraction of a second, flung an enveloping cloud of dust that blended and enwrapped them utterly, and then dwindled to a speck in the far distance, changed back into a droning bee once more.*

Well, it's a wonderful description. The horse rears, the cart overturns, there's a heart-rending crash. And when it's all over, Toad is sitting in the middle of the road with a placid, satisfied expression and murmuring "Poop-poop!" His future is made; he knows what he's going to do.

*Bryson:* Having plenty of money, Toad is notorious for the fact that he always has a passion of some kind. First it was boats, then it was the caravan, and of course from here on out, until he gets thoroughly cured, it's automobiles.

*Davison:* But he always smashes everything up, of course. You remember that at the very beginning he's rowing a little one-man boat on the river, rocking to-and-fro and making a great deal of splash. Water Rat says "Oh, he'll soon get over this, he never keeps up anything for very long." But when they crawl out of the wreckage on the road, there's Toad sitting in the ruins of his caravan and the motor car nowhere in sight:

*The Rat shook him by the shoulder. "Are you coming to help us, Toad?" he demanded sternly.*

*"Glorious, stirring sight!" murmured Toad, never offering to move. "The poetry of motion! The real way to travel! The only way to travel! Here today—in next week tomorrow! Villages skipped, towns and cities jumped—always somebody else's horizon! O bliss! O poop-poop! O my! O my!"*

Now that's very interesting because, you know, I remember England in those days—and those first automobiles. I don't think Mr. Grahame knew a great deal about them. In one place he has Toad steering with a lever and in another place he has him steering with a wheel—the same automobile, too.

*Peterson:* And he described the chauffeur as "the pilot tense and hugging the wheel"; how many "tense pilots" do we see on the road today?

*Bryson:* But I think we have to go ahead and explain how Toad works out his curious destiny, because this passion for the automobile

sweeps not only him but everybody else into a series of quite outrageous adventures.

*Peterson:* He becomes Toad, the Terror of the Highway.

*Bryson:* He smashes automobiles. He goes from one wreck to another.

*Peterson:* He steals an automobile, finally, the biggest and fanciest one that he has ever seen.

*Bryson:* Yes, but long before that he has smashed a lot of his own. And do you remember, Mr. Badger comes to Mole and Rat one day in the spring and says "the time has now come to do something about Toad." So they go in to Toad and push all of his servants aside, and they say "Toad, go up to your room." And they lock him in.

*Peterson:* But he turns the chairs upside down, climbs on top of them, and yells "Poop, poop," working himself into a paroxysm of passion over imaginary automobiles.

*Bryson:* Oh, he triumphs over them completely, because he escapes and goes to have a nice lunch in the pub—here he's acting entirely as a human being—and he steals an automobile, as you say, and gets into more trouble.

*Davison:* I feel about these characters very much as I feel about the characters in Dickens: that I have met them all in real life somewhere or other. That's why I always get so angry when people say that they're caricatures. I always remember that Sir Chartres Biron, who was the magistrate of the London Police Court and had forty years of experience there, used to say that every day of his life one or another of Dickens's characters turned up in his court. Now, I've known all these people. I've known Toad. Toad is rather a cad, you know—he's a liar, he's a thief, he's a braggart, he's dishonest in a hundred ways—but you forgive him as you forgive Falstaff, because of a word that you used just now, Mr. Bryson. That is "passion": this thing is a passion with him, it carries him away, he doesn't mean any evil. The other animals, the other characters, are always extraordinarily kind to him; although they mistrust him and they know he can't be relied upon, they still say "Oh, Toad has many very good qualities." But he's the sort of person you meet in every school, in the army, in the navy; there's always somebody like him in your platoon or in your regiment, just as there's always somebody like Badger. I mean that Badger is by way of being the headmaster, or the colonel, or the kindly bishop, or somebody of that kind.

*Peterson:* Well, Toad has the lack of imagination that makes for courage. He never fears anything. And he also has a certain touching breakdown each time he makes a mistake. He sees himself suddenly, for a brief moment, in the light of a failure and a perfect ass, and he moans that he's sorry and beats his breast and says never again. Then he forgets all about it. He varies and vacillates between enormous self-confidence and enormous lack of it, the way many people do.

*Bryson:* Why did Grahame, having built Toad up this way as a man of obsessions, bring in this epic battle? After all, Toad goes to jail, and gets into all kinds of adventures; he escapes from jail by



dressing as a washerwoman, and has a terrible time trying to prove that he knows how to wash clothes . . .

*Peterson:* And spends a very cold night in the woods, but tells himself that to be free is worth fifty blankets—which I think is a very fine description of freedom.

*Bryson:* But when he finally gets back to Ratty and Mole and all his old friends, he discovers that the stoats and the ferrets and the weasels have taken over Toad Hall. He's been dispossessed by the animals of the Wild Wood. Then you have this terrific battle . . .

*Peterson:* But a battle without bloodshed, curiously enough. Neither the stoats nor the weasels nor the ferrets are really hurt in any way, they're simply driven out.

*Davison:* No, and yet Rat has distributed pistols and cudgels and swords and cutlasses. In the end, Badger says "Oh, all we need are our cudgels, we'll beat them up with that"—and they do, and nobody is very badly hurt.

*Peterson:* Well, do you suppose Mr. Grahame meant a kind of philosophy of good and evil? Because the Wild Wood was presented always as the lurking evil, and then the Wild Wood was really conquered. At the very end of the book, when Mole and Rat and the others went to the Wild Wood, they were greeted by mothers holding up their babies to look at them, they were heroes. The ferrets and the stoats and the weasels were licked. It's an essentially optimistic book all the way through, as a matter of fact.

*Bryson:* I wonder whether it isn't even a bit more gentle than that to the ferrets and the stoats and the weasels, the creatures of the Wild Wood? What got them into trouble was that they *left* the Wild Wood where they belonged, they invaded Mr. Toad's property. If they'd stayed at home they wouldn't have got into trouble.

*Peterson:* Well, they were rather a menace when Mole was alone in the Wild Wood . . .

*Bryson:* Ah, but Mole was in *their* territory then; he'd invaded *their* territory.

*Peterson:* Everybody should stay where he belongs.

*Davison:* Well, of course, that might have had many implications in the England of 1908 when this book was written. It could have referred to the class system, to the educational system, to a hundred other things. Which brings me to another point: this book was written at the height of the Edwardian Age, that very, very comfortable era when it was still possible for a young journalist, say like G. K. Chesterton, to live on three pounds a week and have practically everything that he needed; he could pay his rent, he could have a maid, he could have a bottle of whiskey when he wanted it, he could buy a book here and there, he could get away to the country for the week-end now and then. What a pleasant life those people led! It also occurred to me how typical it is that Grahame himself should have been, as Milne says, in his spare time a Secretary of the Bank of England. Round about that same time, people like Walter de la Mare, John Freeman, and half a dozen others that I can think of were all employed gainfully during the day in offices or banks. Walter de la Mare worked

at Somerset House; John Freeman was, like our poet Wallace Stevens of Hartford, Connecticut, the head man of a very big and important insurance company and a very great name in the world of insurance; just so, Grahame was a great name in banking. And so many of these people, who were by nature poets, actually wrote prose. It wasn't until Edward Thomas came along that he did the same sort of thing in verse.

*Peterson:* What you're saying, perhaps, is that society was not as exacerbated as it is today, and you don't feel any of our contemporary drive or competition among these animals. They're not trying to get ahead of each other or to get something the other one hasn't got.

*Davison:* Yes, that's right.

*Bryson:* Here we are, talking about this book in all these terms, and yet we haven't even mentioned the chapter which I think any lover of *The Wind in the Willows* would say is the high point of the book: the chapter where the little Otter gets lost.

*Peterson:* Yes, and Rat, who always feels responsibility for his fellow man, goes in a boat with Mole to find the little Otter. They think there's a chance he may have gone down to the weir, which is a dangerous part of the water.

*Bryson:* But they find him elsewhere.

*Davison:* Yes, they find him—he's under the protection of the god, of . . .

*Bryson:* But this is a very extraordinary thing in this book, and I'm sure you feel it as deeply as I do: here are all these little animals going about and all of a sudden the pace of the prose changes, a kind of emotional quality comes in, the lyric quality of the book becomes far more meaningful, the chills begin to run down the middle of your back—and you're in the presence of the great god Pan.

*Davison:* Yes. There's a mystical note in the whole thing, and something more than lyric—almost a kind of paean of praise and hope and understanding, a glimpse into what it's all about, though the impression, as you remember, fades away as the Rat, who is the poet, writes a poem about it.

*Peterson:* It's immensely beautiful.

*Bryson:* It's very moving and very beautiful, but does a child get the idea of the baby otter asleep between the sharp hooves of the great god Pan, feeling perfectly safe, and the awe that strikes these other little animals?

*Davison:* I think it depends upon the child, doesn't it?

*Peterson:* If the child has heard about God a good deal, he might easily understand, because it is the way someone might imagine God—considering the amazing difficulty of making God corporeal, making God into something real. These animals sense that something unbelievable is going to happen to them.

*Bryson:* Yes, they approach the island and

*suddenly the Mole felt a great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror—indeed he felt*

*wonderfully at peace and happy—but it was an awe that smote him and held him and, without seeing, he knew it could only mean that some august Presence was very, very near.*

It is done in a way that perhaps a child might long to have it done.

*Davison:* Well, a child in a cathedral or a great church could very well feel the same way.

*Peterson:* And the subsequent forgetting of it is natural, too—because if you have a very great experience like that you can't hold on to it.

*Bryson:* Yes, but only a great master, having brought you into this awesome Presence and made you feel this extraordinary combination of love and terror, could go on and describe it without ever losing the force of the impression. It is one of the measures of Grahame's art that he does.

## NORMAN DOUGLAS

### South Wind

*(As broadcast August 26, 1956)*

GOUVERNEUR PAULDING • WILLIAM Y. TINDALL • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Douglas has what one might call at least four dramatic characters in this book, but I find on rereading it that I'm a little puzzled about their role. He has a landscape which is a concocted landscape, but a fascinating one; he has weather which is concocted weather, and a pretty dramatic element; and he has two sets of people. Now, are the people concocted too?

*Paulding:* The two sets of people are the tourists who come to this island and live on it—Englishmen, Americans, and even a religious sect of Russians in exile—and the natives.

*Bryson:* That's the two sets of people?

*Paulding:* Those are the two sets of characters that create the entire amusement, which is absolutely immense, in this book. But you ask if they're concocted. A tourist can take care of himself: he's been laughed at by writers of all kinds, of every nation. But the natives, I think, are a little bit different—they're concocted, and I object very much to the way in which they're concocted.

*Bryson:* You want to defend these Mediterranean people?

*Paulding:* I certainly do. I think that an Englishman, in the same way as a north Italian, looks at south Italians as just picturesque objects—all funny, all ridiculous, and all very immoral.

*Tindall:* Well, what is your objection? Do you think he con-

descends to these natives, that he is unfair in presenting them, that he makes them figures of fun—is that the objection?

*Paulding*: Yes, my objection is simply on the grounds of truth. I don't believe that a people anywhere can be represented faithfully and truly, even artistically, by groups of very strange and weird and funny characters.

*Tindall*: I wonder whether truth is a consideration here. You used the word *concoction* and I should say . . .

*Bryson*: I used the word "concoction"—don't blame that on Mr. Paulding.

*Tindall*: I'm sorry. Well, I would use the word *confection*. And I would say that verisimilitude is no test to apply to this book. It's a landscape with figures and we should regard it as we would a painting, not because it resembles certain Italians, but because it's an artistic creation.

*Paulding*: An artistic creation—we come to that endless argument about life and artistic creation. I don't think that artistic creation, when very successful, ever traduces life. The greatest books, the greatest satirical books, the funniest books—all must be based on what, I think, is truth.

*Bryson*: Let's go back to the root of this book. After all, we have Norman Douglas's own statement that he's not talking about Capri, which is generally supposed to be the setting of this novel. But whether it is or not, it's so much like Capri that it doesn't make any difference. He's giving us a moral fable; he's saying that the ancient civilization of the Greek or Roman world, which has remnants here, has certain effects upon these various tourists who come to the island—added to the south wind which destroys their moral fibre and makes them behave in ways that are quite unexpected. His purpose is to amuse us. Now, are you objecting that he goes too far in making these people funny?

*Paulding*: I think this is one of the funniest books I've ever read. But I think it is the book of a moralist, and it's on those grounds that I have to argue with the moral that he draws from the humor. I don't object to caricaturing anybody at all. But when a man does it in order to attack Christianity, for instance, and to defend paganism as the ideal way of life—not for the past, but for now—then I think that satire has to be criticized for what it really says, for what it really means.

*Bryson*: And you think Norman Douglas does that?

*Paulding*: I'm afraid he does. Let me offer you a couple of quotes from various characters. For instance, he says: "To find a friend one must close an eye; to keep him, two." Now that sounds to me like Oscar Wilde; I think it's a nice, clever aphorism—indeed, every paragraph in this book starts with an aphorism. Here's another: "You exalt purity to a bad eminence. Chastity is a dead donkey; no beating will bring it to life again. Who killed it? The experience of every sane man and woman in the world." Now, that's funny, but it's also very childish. And if it's meant to be an expression of pagan superiority

over our morality and our Christianity, I think that one has a right to question it.

*Tindall*: Well, I wonder whether you're not taking this too seriously?

*Bryson*: You're not questioning Mr. Paulding's *right* to question?

*Tindall*: No, no—not a bit. But it seems to me that one musn't take these ideas any more seriously than one takes the actions, let's say, in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Now, as you have said, we have certain people upholding some obvious pagan ideas, which are more or less exaggerated—these people are very immoderate in recommending moderation—and you have certain Christian ideas which are subjected to a kind of, well, irony of the most obvious sort. But I don't take these ideas seriously. The Christians may be figures of straw—he's unfair to the Christians—and the pagans are a little too immoderate to be good pagans. But it seems to me that Norman Douglas punctures each one of these people: not one of them is his spokesman. The great spokesman for paganism is Count Caloveglia. He represents, apparently, the Greek ideal, and that is embodied in a statue he creates. Well, if that's the embodiment of paganism, remember that that statue is a fake.

*Paulding*: Yes, and the American millionaire to whom he sells the statue knows very well that it's a fake. He's a very nice millionaire.

*Bryson*: As a matter of fact, the American millionaire, who only sails in and sails out again, is, I should say, just about the only really happy character in the whole book. Except the simple-minded peasants, who are happy—Douglas seems to indicate—because they're just nice animals. But this American millionaire, who's got his fortune by very dubious means, does exactly what he pleases—even to the extent of benignly buying a fake for an immense amount of money, knowing all the time that it's a fake. He rather likes the old count and thinks maybe he ought to have money for his daughter's dowry. He's a very sweet person, this American millionaire. All the other people are somehow caricatured and unhappy.

*Paulding*: They are very unhappy. The American millionaire, when you come down to it, is the only strong man—the only man who knows what he wants, takes what he wants, and does what he wants.

*Tindall*: He's the only one who remains unpunctured. Now Mr. Keith represents some kind of *ersatz* paganism . . .

*Bryson*: He's an *ersatz* Norman Douglas too.

*Tindall*: Yes, of course he is. He's a projection of the author. But here is Douglas laughing at himself and refusing to take his own ideas seriously. Keith is shown to be a terrible bore, and a man who is essentially hollow. I don't believe that one should take these ideas of paganism at their face value; this is just hot air, like the south wind itself.

*Bryson*: But before you comment on that, I want to get one thing straightened out in my own mind. We've got two sets of characters:

we've got the tourists visiting on this island, and we've got the natives. Now which are the pagans?

*Tindall*: The pagans, it seems to me, are the visiting tourists, with the exception of Count Caloveglia—who is the real Greek and who happens to be Italian.

*Bryson*: In other words, it's the phony interpretation of the old Greek civilization by these visiting Anglo-Saxons and Celts that makes the pagans; it's not the natives—they're not pagans.

*Tindall*: No, except maybe Don Francesco, who's ostensibly a Christian; he is a pagan, maybe the real thing. Douglas is taking advantage of his powers at this moment.

*Paulding*: There's another example of the seemingly appalling effects that come upon any northerner, any Western person—any American, Englishman, or Frenchman—when exposed too much to either paganism in the classical sense or to Buddhism, or to whatso-ever; it seems to have an amazingly disintegrating effect on them.

*Bryson*: Well, the south wind comes in too.

*Paulding*: The south wind comes in. But to say that we should just laugh at this book—I think that's unfair to Norman Douglas. I think that Douglas meant a great deal by this book. In fact, I think it's terribly revealing. There he was on this island—or Mr. Keith was on this island—with his perfect garden, with his servants rowing in the beautiful sea, with the changing light on the cliffs. Everything arranged, plenty of money—and yet unhappy, really. I don't want to be neurotic about it, but the laughter is a sort of grinding, tinkling laughter that suggests to me a terribly minor circle of Dante's Inferno. The only two women in the thing that you would tend to like are Miss Wilberforce, who is a lady—she's the only lady, in the best sense of the word, on the island . . .

*Bryson*: Wait a minute, now—that's not all of Miss Wilberforce!

*Paulding*: She is a total drunkard.

*Tindall*: And she undresses herself in public.

*Bryson*: When she's drunk enough. But she's still a lady.

*Paulding*: She's still a lady. And the other one, of course, is the heroine—if you can have a heroine in such a book. That is Mrs. Meadows—and Mrs. Meadows is awfully nice, awfully charming; she is not affected by the south wind. I think he makes that quite clear.

*Bryson*: Yes, she's superior to it.

*Paulding*: She's not the kind to have fallen to pieces on this island; she keeps her nerve and loves her child—and she, unhappily, is a murderess.

*Bryson*: Well, she commits a murder right before your eyes. I think there is, in spite of the extraordinarily episodic character of this book, a central story. Isn't it the story of the bishop, whom we haven't mentioned yet—this muscular Christian from Africa, this bachelor Episcopalian—who comes to the island because his cousin, Mrs. Meadows, is there and because he wants to see what the island is like? He's one of the two characters in the book who aren't almost exactly the same at the end as they were at the beginning. He sees his niece

kill a man, who was her first husband and who was blackmailing her, and he knows perfectly well why she killed him. He's watching her through field glasses when she does it, in that superb passage, and the change in the bishop is that in spite of the fact that he's a very pious man at the beginning, he goes away thinking, well, maybe that was the best thing for her to do; after all, he was a so-and-so and he *should* have been pushed off the cliff.

*Paulding*: Douglas evidently enjoyed that immensely, that effect on the bishop. But it wasn't just the bishop's religion, because the bishop seems to me highly untrained as the bishop of *any* church. He has no theological stand at all. The bishop is a very nice man in every way, with all the public school virtues, who certainly would never condone murder before coming to the island.

*Tindall*: What amazes me about the bishop is that he takes his rather obvious ideas so seriously. A lot of Mr. Keith's conversation sounds like an undergraduate bull session, and apparently the bishop . . .

*Bryson*: You must deal with very brilliant undergraduates, Mr. Tindall.

*Tindall*: Well, I first read this book when I was an undergraduate myself and it had a great effect on me.

*Bryson*: But I'm sure you were a very brilliant undergraduate, Mr. Tindall.

*Tindall*: Thank you, Mr. Bryson. I don't doubt you were, too. But I think the bishop is a great innocent. He's a very likable person who evidently was not well educated in theology and who had no education in philosophy, either, as far as I can make out. When he is subjected to these various things—this shocking landscape, this loosening wind, and the ideas of these eccentrics—this man has nothing with which to resist them; he is broken up, the parts are remolded and he comes out something new. Did it ever occur to you that the development of the bishop is very much like that of Hans Castorp in *The Magic Mountain*? This man is subjected to all kinds of debates from one side and the other, and he is changed—but he's an innocent, too. You would have to be an innocent to be affected.

*Bryson*: Yes, he is something like Hans Castorp. However, I don't find Thomas Mann quite as witty as I do Norman Douglas. And I think the sadness and the cynicism and the malice, in the worst sense of that word, are buried very deep in Mann, if they're there at all. Here in Douglas it's the very theme of the book.

*Tindall*: You feel that the sadness is on the surface?

*Bryson*: No, the sadness is buried under caricature.

*Tindall*: When I read the book I feel a certain sense of gaiety, but you mention this underlying sadness, and I think that is maybe why we go back to this book: it gives us a sense of profundity. What I think Douglas was really doing was examining himself, because superficially he was very much like Mr. Keith. He is looking at this façade and finding a great hollowness underneath. I think that's what makes this book so sad.

*Paulding*: I think you're quite right that Douglas was examining

himself. I also think that he believed a great deal more than you seem to think in the ideas he proposes.

*Bryson:* Which ones, Mr. Paulding?

*Paulding:* Well, there's a long passage about the immense advantages that would accrue if the really brilliant brains of Europe and the highest characters of the north would come to their senses, come and live in the Mediterranean, and adopt the classical virtues of measure. This book was published in 1916 or 1917—I presume it was written shortly before—and in just one passing mark he says "Come and live here instead of digging your eyes out with antediluvian bayonets." It's the only reference whatever to Ypres and the Chemin des Dames and to what was going on in the world of that day. To me it's an evasion too. I think he suffered terribly. Whether he was in the Mediterranean or at home, he was trying to wipe out this terrific drama of the world—which may be the key to his anger at the institutions that produced it.

*Tindall:* Well, do you feel it is an escape from the world rather than a vision of the world as it was before the first World War?

*Paulding:* From the absolutely appallingly funny and vulgar members of the Alpha and Omega Club, frequented only by those who had no admission to society on the island, presided over by a crook called Freddy Parker, who's described as so English that he looked as if he'd spent the night on a train from London to Aberdeen—from those people on up, this heteroclite tourist population and semi-resident population of the island, every single one of them, is absolutely escapist. I think Norman Douglas undoubtedly was, too. I think this is a terribly sad book.

*Tindall:* Well, is this the sort of escape that every intelligent young Englishman, let's say, before that first war, would have wanted? It reminds me of the kind of escape offered by the Boulevard Montparnasse in Paris during the twenties—Americans, of course, took that. I remember going to the Cafe Rotonde looking for Hemingway's Paris, which is very much like Norman Douglas's collection of eccentrics. It wasn't there; that is, there *was* an escape of some kind, but it was mythical.

*Bryson:* They're both strange landscapes, Mr. Tindall, which are always concoctions or, as you say, confections. But I would like to know whether Norman Douglas is really saying that he believes paganism would save the world, or does he make fun of the pagans as much as he does of a kind of Christian?

*Paulding:* I think that's the central argument between all of us, probably. My own answer would be that he is trying in a way—in a hopeless way that's been tried by so many northerners—to believe that paganism can be adopted as a mode of life. It has always failed, it is utterly impossible to do it. As for his criticism of Christianity, my only quarrel with him is that when you compare any two religions or civilizations—I don't care which ones they are—the only interesting way to do it is to take them at their apex, at their poetic peak. Therefore, when you contrast the past dreams of Greece with a completely degraded Christianity, as observed and described with incredible comic



effect—Mr. Tindall, you remember, don't you, the two saints?

*Tindall*: Yes, I would like to say something about them.

*Paulding*: I wish you would. But the balance of the scales is simply ridiculous from an intellectual point of view.

*Tindall*: The book is not fair, but it's not realistic. It occurred to me just a moment ago that these features may reflect the south wind. Isn't it possible that that title is ironic? Mr. Keith is as windy a person as you can find . . .

*Bryson*: But he comes from Scotland.

*Tindall*: Of course, and Douglas is a Scotsman too. Isn't Douglas just poking fun at these windy people? It's a kind of symposium of various winds.

*Bryson*: Let me intervene on Mr. Paulding's side for a moment: what about Count Caloveglia? He was an old rascal, selling his very beautiful statue as if it were an antique, although he made it himself; his motives are of the best—he's just trying to get a dowry for his daughter. Isn't his argument on behalf of paganism meant to be taken seriously?

*Tindall*: I wonder. I didn't take it seriously. I would agree that Douglas favors the pagan side, but after all he's showing that even that is pretty windy and immoderate and extravagant—it's too extravagant to be really pagan.

*Paulding*: I disagree with you: I think that he desperately wanted to believe in the pagan solution.

*Tindall*: He may have wanted, but he realized it wouldn't work.

*Paulding*: Do you know why? Because he was such a wonderful artist. The artist emerges over the wit and through the structure, through the intellectual convictions, through the desperate attempt at self-justification. At one time Keith, after pages and pages of diatribe against the northern climate and everything about England and Scotland, suddenly is horribly homesick. That was Douglas's homesickness, too. You were talking about the young men: wasn't it natural for them to seek escape? There's only one young man in this book, young Denis; all the others have been trying escape—trying it, trying it.

*Tindall*: He develops too, he becomes mature. But, of course, his development isn't convincing.

*Bryson*: He's a pretty trivial character, after all.

*Tindall*: Oh, very true.

*Bryson*: I don't think Douglas is much interested in Denis. Perhaps he wanted to have some young man grow up, but Denis's growing up is only to the point of being mature enough to be impudent. However, in Denis's experiences you have some assertion of this paganism over Christianity in his abortive and unhappy love affair. But I want to go back to the American millionaire for a moment . . .

*Tindall*: He seems to be your favorite.

*Bryson*: Because he's the only man in the whole business, it seems to me, who is happy. Now, why did Douglas make this dubious—well, his fortune was dubious, he got it by selling rather dubious

merchandise—why does Douglas make this sensualist the one happy person in the book?

*Paulding:* I think it's because for once Mr. Douglas forgot Greece and condescended to admire the Roman virtues. He isn't the first who has compared the strong American business man to the Roman.

*Bryson:* No.

*Paulding:* If I remember it, Henry James did. At any rate, there is again a sort of a happy paganism—not as lofty as the Greek or even as Caloveglia's, but still a good workable paganism and happy and strong.

*Tindall:* There's a very good argument between the Count and Mr. van Koppen. The latter upholds the beauty of steam engines and the Count condemns that beauty as utilitarian, compared with pagan beauty which is useless. But they're very good friends and they get along together and some sort of compromise is suggested—oh, I don't think seriously.

*Bryson:* But to get back to Denis for a moment: he's the only character outside of Bishop Heard who actually goes through any change, except to get a little older and, in Miss Wilberforce's case, a little more dissolute—no, that's the wrong word . . .

*Paulding:* A little drunker—but remember that Miss Wilberforce had a reason for drinking.

*Bryson:* She becomes drunker and more exhibitionist; but outside of those people, Denis is the only one who seems to go through any change. Now, is there a kind of a failure here to take an interest in youth that makes him such a flaccid and unimportant character?

*Tindall:* I think it's a failure in art. Denis is presented quite thoroughly at the beginning, then Douglas seems to forget about him, but he comes in again at the end and holds the stage after the bishop has disappeared.

*Bryson:* He's grown up.

*Tindall:* But his growth is very sudden, and I don't think Douglas gives evidence for it as he does in the case of Bishop Heard.

*Paulding:* I don't believe that the bishop or Denis or Mrs. Meadows or Miss Wilberforce can be considered as central characters. The central character is Keith.

*Bryson:* Not the south wind?

*Tindall:* What seems to me central is what Douglas calls the exotic scholarship, the luminous asides, and the fruitful digressions.

*Bryson:* Yes, but the man insisted himself—I mean that Norman Douglas did. When somebody criticized *South Wind* as having no plot, he said "This is nonsense; it's all plot."

*Paulding:* There is one passage that I'd like to cite. When Miss Wilberforce is very drunk, she runs into this worldly priest and he says to her, "Why are you in mourning?" She always wears black. And she looks at him, drunk as a lord, and says she is in mourning, as everybody ought to be, for his lost innocence. I think the whole book is lost innocence.

*Bryson:* Well, lost innocence is set in a landscape that I think

is spiritualized, in the broader meaning of that term, in a most extraordinary way. I always have the feeling that the south wind is a very *outside* god from the machine—that what Douglas is really trying to solve, in his own mind, is the problem of nostalgia for the classical period. I don't think he ever quite believes that paganism would bring the world back to sanity; but the pagan world was a sane world, a measured world, and he sort of hopes, in spite of being a northern Celt, that it can come back again. The world as it is disappoints him, disheartens him. Maybe the war clanging behind him, the thundering and killing, was what he was trying to escape by this imaginary but nevertheless beautiful classical paganism.

## H. G. WELLS

# *The War of the Worlds*

(As broadcast September 2, 1956)

THOMAS RITCHIE ADAM • GORDON S. HAIGHT • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* H. G. Wells spent a long and very active life inventing strange landscapes. I doubt that anybody invented more, or more varied ones, than he did.

*Haight:* In all parts of the universe. I met him once when he was a very old man—I think in the last years of his life; he'd come over . . .

*Bryson:* Do you mean here in America?

*Haight:* Yes, in America. He'd come over here to see the World's Fair and the newest inventions on display there, and he seemed rather tired and discouraged by what he saw.

*Bryson:* Well, you met him as an old man. I spent an evening with him in his prime, a good many years ago, and I doubt that I've ever met a man who gave such an impression of incessant nervous energy—not effort, but energy applied constantly to thought and almost constantly to invention.

*Adam:* I was brought up under the shadow of H. G. Wells as a student in Scotland.

*Bryson:* You're that lost generation that he is supposed to have inspired, Mr. Adam?

*Adam:* A generation before yours, Mr. Bryson. But he had an enormous impact on our generation as a communicator—not as an original thinker or even as a great dramatic writer, but he did communicate little ideas in an exciting, dramatic way.

*Bryson:* Of course, in 1897, when he was writing this book, he had scarcely ceased being a hard-working biology teacher. He was not yet a great world figure in literature. Do you think this power of communication went all the way through his career?

*Adam:* I think that he was always a moralist. I think that he first and foremost wanted to communicate, he wanted to tell people, but Mr. Haight may consider that he was first and foremost a writer.

*Haight:* Well, his first success was surely as a writer. His first fame came from his invention of these marvelous stories.

*Bryson:* Science fiction. What was Wells doing with it?

*Haight:* I should think Wells was trying to make his living by it; he was keeping careful account of what he could live on at that point. And it seems to me just a development of journalism, the sort of thing that Poe and many other writers have done.

*Adam:* That is not the impression that *The War of the Worlds* made on me when I read it first, nor even when I read it again. It seems to me to be an honest attempt by a man who's trying to communicate and extrapolate the ideas of his time into alternative, possible developments of the world, and using a modern variation of the ballad.

*Bryson:* What do you mean by ballad?

*Adam:* The way in which you tell the exciting story of *The Ballad of Bannockburn*, and those other stories of great historical import; you tell them in exciting, dramatic form so that the people can understand them.

*Bryson:* Singing at the banquet of the warriors with your harp, so to speak.

*Haight:* But *this* narrator seems to have very little music in him as he views the world he lives in. The terrifying circumstances of his life may have scared all the tune out of him, I suppose. But I see what you mean by the ballad—the excitement of it, the adventure.

*Bryson:* It is a great adventure story, of course. But there's something else I want to clear up: Mr. Adams says Wells wanted to communicate morals, Mr. Haight says he wanted to make a living. Can't you do both?

*Adam:* It seems to me that one should accept the highest motive as the true one; the other is incidental.

*Bryson:* Well, teachers and moralists and great philosophical writers, as well as great story-tellers, are worthy of their hire. And so if Mr. Wells wanted to become rich and famous, which he certainly did in the next twenty-five or thirty years, it was legitimate—but it doesn't seem to me to have interfered with his basic purpose. Why did he choose science fiction as a way of getting across his ideas?

*Haight:* I think he saw it as the modern fairy tale; instead of a dragon or a mysterious monster you have a creature from Mars, who was something human, perhaps, at one point a million years back.

*Adam:* As far as I'm concerned, the modern fairy tale is science itself. I'm not a scientist, I can't make the experiments, and so I take those wonders for granted.

*Bryson:* But these wonders go a bit further. Here the people from Mars come down to earth. What are Well's Martians like?

*Haight:* Well, they're rather unattractive to us.

*Bryson:* They're not very human, it's true.

*Haight*: Not at all human; they're all brain, a brain four feet in diameter with two arms of eight tentacles each.

*Bryson*: They always sound to me as if they looked like small octopuses.

*Haight*: Yes, it's a curious view of human life to think that we might develop, after a million years, into something like *that*—it seems more like a regression to the sea animals.

*Adam*: But is it regression to have developed the brain more than the body?

*Haight*: Well, it seems not—I've spent my life trying to develop brains—but as I read Wells's account of it, the more brain people develop the less attractive they become.

*Bryson*: Let's locate this among the undergraduates of Yale, Mr. Haight: do you find that the better bodies they have, the worse brains they have—and vice versa?

*Haight*: Well, I can't speak for Yale on that; perhaps we could have a New York University view from Mr. Adam.

*Bryson*: Yale passes; what about New York University?

*Adam*: I think New York University is willing to be perfectly honest about it: as far as we can see, for the next thousand years we'll have to go on developing brain at a very high speed—the body is catching up with us all the way.

*Haight*: Wells suggests at one place in this book that as the brain develops and the body decays, the moral sense seems to go with it. That's a curious contradiction. We usually think that the more the brain is developed, the more the moral sense will be developed too.

*Bryson*: But isn't it commonly thought nowadays that if you're too well developed intellectually—if you become, you know, a kind of a grind in your studies—that you lose your moral sense, you become a kind of social danger?

*Haight*: We must go back to the Aristotelian meaning, I suppose, of the body and mind. But Wells's Martians have developed brains to a most unattractive degree.

*Adam*: This extrapolation of brain as immoral is a very important one. I think Wells in his *War of the Worlds* was warning the world—was warning the community of England, anyway—that if you took the consequences of nineteenth-century science and said the whole end of man was intellect, then you were going to have an immoral, basically irreligious man.

*Bryson*: Is it one of his themes, then?

*Adam*: I think so. I think Wells was a great moralist. He's warning against the self-centeredness of man as a human creature believing that his intellect is supreme in the universe; and he's introducing the fear of God again in terms of Martian invasion—a dramatic way to do it.

*Haight*: His narrator is, then, a horrible example because he's certainly a very self-centered person. Whatever religion he shows seems to me to be directed to his own self-protection. I can't see that it helps the poor curate, for example, who falls into his company.

*Bryson:* Let us get this story set up a bit. You have these strange cylinders—I never could quite decide how big they were . . .

*Haight:* A hundred feet in diameter.

*Bryson:* Yes, a hundred feet in diameter, and yet at other times it seems as if they couldn't have been that big.

*Adam:* They were fired from a gun.

*Bryson:* On Mars. The astronomers see them fired a long time before they reach the earth; the astronomers say there are some very strange things going on on Mars, but nobody pays any attention. This is your self-centeredness, Mr. Adam. And then they begin to hit the earth, one after another. At first they're too hot to approach. Anyway, people think it's just a meteorite or something that has made a big hole in the heath. Then the top starts to unscrew from the inside and these strange creatures, each one something like a leather octopus, emerge. The first thing they produce is a heat ray which sounds like something straight out of today . . .

*Haight:* A thermonuclear weapon.

*Bryson:* Yes, a heat ray that flattens everything—destroys guns, destroys buildings, destroys men.

*Haight:* They've got poison gas, too.

*Bryson:* And they have machines on legs like big tripods, a hundred feet high, that go stalking across the countryside, destroying everything.

*Haight:* And you wonder what is their motive; what have they come to the earth for? But he explains that they've come for food.

*Bryson:* Yes, because Mars is nearer to being dried up than the earth and they need a new planet.

*Adam:* Man is in danger from something that wants to treat him merely as food. The Martian is important in Wells's story because the Martian treats man as a lower animal—as man himself treats cattle.

*Haight:* The colonial policy.

*Bryson:* I don't know that emperors ever ate their slaves, Mr. Haight.

*Haight:* Well, the Martians don't *eat* their victims.

*Bryson:* No, they do something much more horrible.

*Haight:* Much worse: they have a system of ingestion. It reminds you that this book was written two or three years after *Dracula*.

*Adam:* I believe that Wells, there, was merely giving a horrorist's touch, that there is nothing actually significant in the idea of the Martians as superior, powerful creatures, doing away with our forms of nutrition. I think Wells had no real message in that at all.

*Haight:* But, it seems to me that he's regressed a little. If the Martians are the great brains that they're supposed to be, I should think they would have devised a simpler way of feeding themselves and perhaps a way of cultivating food on their own planet. They brought a few specimens along to eat on the trip—a sort of picnic snack, you remember.

*Bryson:* I think he's at least partly making the point that if we treat all lower orders of the animal world as we do, exploiting them

completely as food and as animal energy, we shouldn't be surprised if more highly-developed beings do the same thing to us. Now what's the moral of that?

*Adam*: Do as you will be done by, Mr. Bryson.

*Bryson*: Or go vegetarian.

*Haight*: Most of Wells's fine people in his other stories are vegetarians. There's a very early article of his, in the *Pall Mall Budget*, where he speculates about the man of the year 1,000,000 A.D. He has developed into nothing but a large brain with no nose, no ears, a tiny little mouth and hands; he takes his food not by eating it—his mouth's just to breathe through—but by bathing in it, soaking in it like a crustacean of some sort. That was Wells's first attempt four years before he wrote *The War of the Worlds*.

*Adam*: When he wrote that article, people throughout the world didn't realize the importance to social culture and to ordinary life of the food they eat and the way they eat it. Nowadays we do; we know that in a great part of Africa the people can't progress properly because they don't eat the right food.

*Bryson*: You don't need to go so far from home, Mr. Adam.

*Adam*: To me, Wells is very sound in his attack on the ideas of English cooking. He rather admired the Martians for their more logical . . .

*Bryson*: He may have, but in most of the book he's struck with horror because of the lack of any human sympathy on the part of these Martian monsters, with their horrible fighting machines. But has he any sympathy, either, for the people who are being destroyed by the thousands as the Martian invasion progresses?

*Haight*: I was struck by how dispassionate the narrator is: he seems actually cold towards the horrors he sees. There are all sorts of touching little episodes but he records them the way a camera would, with no trace of human feeling. I suppose that's his method.

*Bryson*: There are really only three characters besides the narrator, who has no name. There's his brother, who's brought in to tell about the panic which the narrator himself couldn't have seen, and then there's the curate . . . but what about this curate?

*Haight*: Well, the curate is a bad example of the Church of England. He's chinless and weak and afraid and whimpering, and the narrator finally disposes of him with a meat cleaver. He feels a little guilt, but nothing very serious that a few moments' prayer doesn't remove from his conscience.

*Adam*: Here Wells has interrupted his story to wrestle with his soul about the established church. It seems to me quite important in the story that before man—the narrator is more or less the man of the future—before man can face the realities of life, he's got to do away with established follies. Wells is, after all, a mild revolutionary: he was a republican and against the Church of England. He's a precursor of mild revolution—not Marxist revolution, but a quiet socialist revolution.

*Haight*: One thing he says about the curate is that he was incapable of cooperation—remember that? And the same thing happens

in the case of the third character, whom we didn't get around to mentioning: the artillery man on Putney Hill.

*Bryson:* But the curate was incapable of cooperation because Wells was using him to find a meaning for this question: what have we done that Mars should invade us? What have *I* done that I should suffer this way? Wells had no patience with that sort of thing.

*Haight:* As I remember, that remark comes when the curate is out in the scullery cadging the burgundy they were supposed to save for ten days and getting drunk on it. That was his idea of cooperation, of dividing the food equally.

*Bryson:* But after the narrator has, as you say, disposed of him with a meat cleaver to save his own life or perhaps just to get rid of a nuisance, he goes on up Putney Hill. I don't think one can really do this book justice without remembering the man on Putney Hill, who's become a kind of figure—unnamed again—in modern British literature.

*Adam:* And a very true figure, too. He represents the small man, the man with good ideals and great courage; at the same time, he represents the man who talks a lot but when it comes to action he's not there . . .

*Haight:* I should say that Wells is a little skeptical of his courage. The first time we see him is when he's running away from that initial contact with the Martians, and we see him next on Putney Hill where he's been hiding in a sewer.

*Bryson:* Now, Mr. Haight, wouldn't *you* have run away if you'd seen a heat ray destroying people and houses and forests?

*Haight:* I certainly would.

*Bryson:* But this man on Putney Hill talks magnificently; he talks a beautiful dream world . . .

*Adam:* He talks like Wells.

*Bryson:* And that's part of the point.

*Adam:* There I think that Wells meant to make a little fun of himself.

*Bryson:* He talks such wonderful dreams about how the human race is going to conquer the Martians, but really he's too gluttonous and lazy to do anything about it.

*Haight:* He talks about the books they'll find—they'll go down and find the British Museum, and take the books underground; the secrets of engineering will then be preserved for the human race; they'll live underground in the sewers and keep this flame alive.

*Adam:* What's more, he realizes that men will submit to the Martians as a whole, that the bulk of the people are so conditioned by convention that they'll miss the Martian tyranny if it once goes—and that humanity must depend upon this minority of intellectual, courageous, underground characters.

*Bryson:* But are you let down at the end of this story? Mr. Wells had up his sleeve something that saved humanity—after all, he's telling the story as a survivor; the Martians *couldn't* have conquered the earth, or we wouldn't have a happy ending.

*Haight:* The happy ending is a little corny, perhaps. He goes



back to his house and thinks all is over with him and then he turns around and there's his wife coming in, saying "I'm sure he isn't here."

*Bryson*: Ah yes, but what happened to the Martians?

*Haight*: The Martians died of the measles.

*Bryson*: And did that let you down a bit?

*Haight*: I can't remember when I haven't known this book, so that I knew it was coming.

*Bryson*: That's where Wells the biologist supervenes on Wells the engineer; he's been making heat rays and poison gas and things like that, but now suddenly he becomes a biologist and remembers that on Mars they probably had no microbes.

*Adam*: I always feel that that is a slightly trick ending. But when Mr. Haight said that he was let down a little, I wondered if Mr. Haight was let down when he finished the Book of Job—because that has a corny ending, too. And to me Wells has some of the character of the Biblical prophet: Wells always speaks out and cries "woe" to the multitudes. That's why he lacks sympathy—he's not in sympathy with human beings. Wells is a man in search of an ultimate religion, battling the nineteenth-century materialism and trying to get back to the concepts of the Almighty that he had when he was a boy.

*Haight*: You go back in your Scotch way to the Old Testament, but I should like to think of the Golden Rule. I think of that scene near the beginning where the narrator borrows a horse from the landlord to take his wife off to Leatherhead. On the way back the horse goes into a ditch and is killed, and he says: "His neck was broken, poor brute!" Walking home, he stumbles over a figure lying in the path; it was the landlord, and he says "Apparently his neck had been broken." There is a complete lack of sympathy in both cases; I admit there was little he could do at that point, but . . .

*Bryson*: Are you suggesting that Mr. Adam's Scotchness and Old Testament temperament would behave the same way?

*Adam*: But certainly! The complete satisfaction of finding, after I have destroyed a man's property, that it doesn't matter because the man himself is dead, creates in me a warm Gaelic glow.

*Haight*: Or take another little episode: on the North Road, when the great panic is on, there's an old, old man whom they're trying to move along. He has some pots of orchids with his and says "These are valuable; I can't leave my orchids, I must stay here." If Dickens had touched that, he would have brought it to life so that you never could forget it—but here it's just one of the million things that Wells notes and passes on. There's a coldness about it.

*Bryson*: But Dickens wasn't trying to tell you what the future would be like; Wells, however, was trying to keep sympathy and sentimentality out of it so that we could see clearly the dangers that were ahead of us.

*Haight*: I think there's more danger in lack of sympathy than in the helping hand.

*Adam*: Do you feel that Wells was wrong in suggesting that if we continue to be a self-centered, closed-up culture, the wrath of the Lord will strike us and we'll be utterly destroyed? Don't you think that there's still a place in modern literature for this shock psychology?

You need to shock people if they remain completely complacent about their culture and their own capacity to rule the universe.

*Haight:* I think that is where I differ from you and Wells, Mr. Adam. I'm not sure whether you agree with him on this, but it seems to me that he puts his faith in organization, in systems imposed on other people; if you can only get all learning drawn up on little charts and all information codified, if you can get everybody put in his place, if you can get somebody to run them—the world would go along all right. That seems to be Wells's idea, but I think of the individual, of the artillery man, if you like; I think you've got to survive for what you are inside.

*Bryson:* But that's the later Wells that you're talking about; that's not Wells when he was thirty years old, writing science fiction and letting morality seep into it. It's afterward that he thought organization could do everything.

*Haight:* I see traces of that even in these very early books.

*Bryson:* Even in *The War of the Worlds*?

*Haight:* Well, there's the artillery man. He says if we can gather up all the books of the British Museum and get them underground, we'll be able to beat the Martians.

*Adam:* I agree with Mr. Haight there, but I remind him of one very touching point at the end where the narrator says he tried to pray; he had given up the prayer of the established religion, and eventually prayed to the god of darkness. There, I think, Wells is speaking right from his heart.

*Bryson:* And it is the old, direct religious feeling as against the too-complacent institutional religion which the curate represents, and which goes to pieces under stress. Well, is this wonderful story spoiled by the intrusion of Wells's incorrigible moralism?

*Haight:* It doesn't seem so to me. This is a book that you read as a child, and you suspend your mature judgment of it; the moral doesn't intrude on the mind that's absorbing it as adventure. It's a thrilling story.

*Adam:* I believe the function of the book is to put across Wells's ideas, and to put them across for the childlike mind—which is the mind of most people—by an exciting, dramatic form, not by sheer intellection.

*Haight:* He may be intending to put them across, but the child enjoys the book regardless of it.

*Bryson:* I think it raises a question of the utmost importance in the development of civilization—to which Wells, of course, gave his whole life of thought. If you put the moral into so dramatic a story, the question is whether the person who is caught is going to give a whoop for the moral and pay any attention to it.

*Adam:* Speaking from my point of view, which is that of a moralistic student of social affairs, I'd like literature to do that—but whether it does or not, I don't know.

*Haight:* I'm sure it always does.

*Bryson:* In any case, nobody is hurt by reading an exciting story. If he misses the moral—well, maybe he'll be so excited that he'll read the story again and this time the moral will stick.

# SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

## Poems

(As broadcast September 9, 1956)

WALTER COHEN

•

EDITH WALTON

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Coleridge got a good deal out of his association with Wordsworth, as everybody knows. They had a strange, almost weird companionship and partnership. At one time they made a bargain they were going to try to do two complementary things, which brings us into the world of strange landscapes: Wordsworth was going to try to make simple things poetic and Coleridge was going to try to make incredible things real.

*Cohen:* And he illustrated his part of the union in the three poems that I suppose we first think of: *Kubla Khan*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and *Christabel*—all poems in which the landscape is strange, far removed, and remote, but in which the emotion is human and touching and comes very close to us.

*Bryson:* But are the landscapes credible? Did Coleridge succeed in the major part of the bargain—to make you believe that Kubla Khan ever built the pleasure-dome?

*Cohen:* I think that we accept it and are left in a mood of rapture and admiration at the end of the poem. But the credibility is particularly emphatic, I think, in *The Ancient Mariner*. One of its wonders is that it is a poem of pure magic and yet we go on reading it as if it were purely an adventure story of the Spanish Main.

*Walton:* Of course, one interesting thing about all three of these poems is that their magic peculiarly belongs to Coleridge. In other phases of his work he wrote poems that are reminiscent of Wordsworth, but Wordsworth never in his wildest dreams could have created the world of fantasy and magic and strangeness that Coleridge did in these poems.

*Cohen:* There's a similarity, indeed, between much of his work and Wordsworth's. Coleridge was perhaps the introducer of many of the themes and even of some of the spirit, which, for one reason or another—perhaps because of Wordsworth's more rounded and more successful life—we tend to associate peculiarly with Wordsworth.

*Bryson:* Let me pick you up on one point that you suggest when you mention Wordsworth's "more rounded"—and of course one means longer, healthier, happier, and more respectable—life. Coleridge presents a problem which one has to face right from the beginning, and I think you see it more specifically in *Kubla Khan* than you do in any of the other poems. Here's a poem of astonishingly powerful sug-

gestiveness, but it breaks right off. It wasn't ever finished. Coleridge said that was because a man came in and interrupted him.

*Walton*: "A person on business from Porlock."

*Bryson*: He said he was interrupted, and he never could get back to it. All kinds of theories of how poets succeed in creating magic have been based upon this experience of Coleridge's.

*Walton*: Of course, as we all know, Coleridge for the better part of his life took opium. At the period when these three great poems were written he was just starting his addiction. There was a late nineteenth-century critic who charged him with having written his poems under the influence of opium, in an abnormal state, and so on. Now this to some degree may be true of *Kubla Khan*, but it certainly is not true of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which is a beautifully constructed, carefully thought out, splendidly organized poem that couldn't possibly be considered a dream fantasy as, in some sense, *Kubla Khan* can be.

*Bryson*: Let's stick to *Kubla* for a minute. I don't know of any other poem in which there is the same kind of emotional and intellectual and linguistic amalgam. But then he does break off. *Was* it just a dream, as he said?

*Cohen*: I should say that perhaps the amalgam of intellect and imagination is better illustrated in some of Coleridge's other poems—*The Ode to Dejection*, for instance.

*Bryson*: But he finished that. Here's one he couldn't finish; was that because it was a dream?

*Cohen*: Who knows? Certainly that was his story. His story is that it came to him in the course of a dream consequent on taking opium. I don't believe that for a minute, really. I think that the story of the composition of the poem and its breaking off are merely part of the wonder and mystery that Coleridge decided to throw over it.

*Walton*: Well, I would like to point out that a great deal of Coleridge's work is fragmentary; there are a great many unfinished and tantalizing tidbits that never were fully developed.

*Bryson*: That's true of many poets, Miss Walton.

*Walton*: Right, but even *Christabel*, for instance, which is a long poem divided into two sections, written at different times—even *Christabel* was never finished; and although Coleridge claimed that he had the design for this poem in his mind, nobody will ever know what the design was because it, too, breaks off.

*Cohen*: It's probably quite true—I should be tempted to believe it—that Coleridge did have the design for all of his unfinished works in his mind. Coleridge had probably the most capacious mind of any English poet; he was probably the most intellectual of all English poets, and whatever he did he seems to have done better than anyone else. No one has so fused imagination and reason into poetry as Coleridge has, no one has written finer criticism—but what Coleridge didn't have was the power to finish, to realize the conceptions which were in his mind.

*Walton*: But in spite of his intellect he didn't have the aridity of emotion that you sometimes associate with a purely intellectual writer. Not only in the three great poems but in many of the lesser poems he

wrote about his life in Lake Country, you get all this welling-up of personal emotion, this association with the landscape, with friends; and then he usually, because of his intellect, managed to work in his philosophical ideas too. This was a great man, this was a genius—of that I am convinced.

*Cohen*: Yes, despite his intellect he was not a purely intellectual writer. He was a person in whom emotional life played a great part; he was a man whose feelings gave rise to his thoughts, and his thoughts in turn gave rise to his feelings. Take for instance, one of his latest works, not one of these three, but the *Ode to Dejection*. The theme is precisely similar to one that Shelley wrote on, and yet what a vast difference there is between the two. Both poets are dejected, but Shelley remains in his dejection—a mood of shared sadness—whereas Coleridge analyzes his dejection. He really does what Shelley in his *Ode to the Nightingale*, for example, speaks of doing; he looks before and after. Coleridge *knows* why he was dejected; he explains what will carry him out of his dejection.

*Walton*: But how many people know the *Ode to Dejection*? This is what has always interested me: Coleridge's reputation as a poet is so dominated by *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* that there are thousands of people who probably have never read any of his other poems. If those three great poems were eliminated from the body of his work, where would his reputation stand, do you think?

*Bryson*: I wouldn't undertake to guess that, but I would like to pick up your point. Do these three poems, which are so magical but so different, really have something in common that sets them apart from his other poems?

*Walton*: It seems to me that they have a compelling, a kind of *mesmerizing* quality; they are couched in a language and express a feeling and a music to which anyone can respond, even any school child. Some of the other poetry that he wrote is characteristic of the romantic movement, of the Lake poets, and so on. These three stand apart; they are as vivid now as they were when they were written over a hundred and fifty years ago. I presume they always will be that vivid. They appeal to the deep emotions that are drawn to strangeness and fantasy and music and dream. This is pure poetry.

*Cohen*: What you say about them is a fact. I don't think, though, that it is necessarily a reflection on the others. The *Ode to Dejection* introduces a very important theory of esthetic response, for instance, in the two lines which occur in one of the stanzas:

*I see them all so excellently fair,  
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!*

And then he goes on to explain that for us to realize the full beauty of nature we must bring to it some inner power, which in this poem he calls joy. But while it's true that the three familiar poems have the qualities you mention, I think that even if they were removed from the body of his work Coleridge would still remain a considerable poet. You know that he says of himself and the Wordsworths (he and they were close friends for a while): "we were three bodies but one soul."

And it's very interesting and revealing to see how often he anticipates the theories which, as I've mentioned before, we more especially associate with Wordsworth. The doctrine of the soul's reminiscence, for instance, which occurs in Wordsworth's great ode, Wordsworth borrowed from Coleridge. *The Prelude* is written under Coleridge's inspiration and embodies many of his ideas and sentiments.

*Walton:* I greatly admire some of those other poems like the *Ode to Dejection*, *Frost at Midnight*—some of the poems in that group—but I might just as well confess frankly that there are a great many poems written by Coleridge in a more bucolic, more sententious mood—apostrophizing virtue, imagination, fancy, and so forth—that I find rather hard to take. There is one difference, however, between Coleridge and Wordsworth. When Wordsworth is dull, he is unmitigatedly dull; he can bore you within an inch of your life. But always in Coleridge, even in the less successful poems, even in the ones that are bucolic and too domesticated for me, there are always some real nuggets of fancy, of observation, of music—he is never totally dull.

*Cohen:* I think one of the prime distinctions of Coleridge's poetry is that his great intellect is always there, we always see the mind at work. We are enchanted with the music of the verse, we're carried away with the pictures which rise like pure exhalations from the words. For instance, in reading *Kubla Khan*, who can separate the words from the image in his mind? It seems to be our own mind working. Coleridge's lines come before us as if they were always there, and yet part of their interest derives from the fact that his mind is working and that his sensuous imagination is so intimately linked with it.

*Walton:* In *Kubla Khan*, particularly, it makes almost no difference whether you understand what Coleridge is trying to say or not—the music and the feeling themselves are so great, they lay such a hold upon one . . .

*Cohen:* They enforce understanding.

*Walton:* That's right. And it interests me, too, how Coleridge has used the materials of balladry. He was a great reader of old ballads—in the *Ode to Dejection* there's a reference to the *Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence*. But he has taken the ballad form which always appealed to people in general—I mean folk poetry—and he has transmuted it into something so much more beautiful and so much more challenging and so much more permanent.

*Bryson:* When you mention his intellect, one is reminded of the fact that Coleridge was, in a sense, a professional philosopher: he gave lectures on philosophy, he translated a great deal of German philosophy . . .

*Cohen:* Would that he had done less!

*Bryson:* I agree. Would *Kubla Khan* have got finished if he hadn't spent so much time thinking in abstract terms?

*Cohen:* *Kubla Khan*, *Christabel*, and *The Ancient Mariner* were all written at the time of Coleridge's greatest mental health. They were the product of the years of his first acquaintance with the Wordsworths and came at a time when he still had hope, still had some confidence in himself. He didn't turn to philosophy so extensively

until later years. And, curiously enough, his friends, while they didn't perhaps encourage him, certainly didn't discourage him from his prose ventures. They did encourage him to take up lecturing, as we know, later on in London. There are references in letters of all his friends—Charles Lamb, Wordsworth, Southey, Dorothy Wordsworth—to the fact that Coleridge simply will not go on with any project that he takes up. And I think that rather than see him entirely inactive, rather than stand by and watch this wonderful mind, this soaring intellect, simply turn in on itself and sit in lethargy, they encouraged him to do anything that would keep him active.

*Walton*: Also, these great poems were written in his youth. Unbelievably, they were written in 1797, when Coleridge was only twenty-five years old. I think it's worth at least speculating about whether this enormous freshness and fertility of imagination were not peculiarly a youthful thing, whether in later life—even if he hadn't taken opium—Coleridge could have continued in the same vein.

*Bryson*: Even if he hadn't gone intellectual, too?

*Walton*: I can't help feeling that all this fusty-dusty philosophizing business had something to do with the fact that he was an unhappy and maladjusted man who possibly in our modern age, with Freud and what not, might have discovered the source of his unhappiness.

*Cohen*: I think it's just as well, perhaps, that nothing was done. We speak of an unhappy, maladjusted man; we probably think of Coleridge's life as a failure—and yet I sometimes wonder.

*Walton*: Who thinks of his life as a failure? I don't.

*Cohen*: Well, good. But some people do, and some people even suggest that perhaps with later therapeutic devices he might have been redeemed from some of these flaws.

*Bryson*: He probably wouldn't have written *Kubla Khan* in the first place if his neurosis had been cured.

*Cohen*: Assuming that he had one.

*Bryson*: Well, whatever you want to call it.

*Cohen*: Nevertheless, while it's true that this early period in which he wrote the three great poems or the three magic poems was one of comparative health for him, even at that time he was already aware, and people around him were aware, of this curious disposition which was gaining on him. It's very interesting about Coleridge that just as he was probably the greatest critic, certainly, among English poets—his criticism of Shakespeare, his analysis of the powers and qualities of Wordsworth's style touch the very top rank of critical insight—he was equally a valid critic about himself.

*Walton*: Because that comes out very clearly in his poems.

*Cohen*: Yes, and it comes out even before these poems that you mentioned. For instance, in lines that he wrote in 1794—imagine, when he was only twenty-two years old!—lines written on a friend who had died recently, he speaks of standing at the grave; his thoughts naturally turn on himself, as they do so frequently in many of his poems, and he says:

*As oft at twilight gloom thy grave I pass,  
And sit me down upon its recent grass,*

*With introverted eye I contemplate  
 Similitude of soul, perhaps of—Fate!  
 To me hath Heaven with bounteous hand assigned  
 Energetic Reason and a shaping mind,  
 The daring ken of Truth, the Patriot's part,  
 And Pity's sigh, that breathes the gentle heart—  
 Sloth-jaundiced all! . . .*

Even at twenty-two, Coleridge knew what his inner disposition was and what would finally overcome him.

*Walton:* Of course, there's a whole school of thought that believes that genius should not be—and seldom is—too normal, too well adjusted. And Coleridge is almost the prototype of the unhappy, driven, tormented, complicated man whom we think of as a genius. I don't know that I subscribe to that theory. But there have been moments when I have felt that William Wordsworth was a little too well adjusted and a little too contented with his life, and that in that respect perhaps Coleridge had an edge on him.

*Bryson:* Here you've got opium, you've got a slothful temperament, and you've got a tendency to abstract thought. It's surprising, when one considers Coleridge's whole career, that he ever got any poems written in this vein of pure lyric freshness.

*Walton:* But I question the slothful temperament; I think we sometimes quote Coleridge's own words on that—he was full of self-disparagement. It's true that he didn't produce any such body of poetry as, say, Tennyson or Browning, but he did produce a fairly substantial body, and in addition to that he wrote all these lectures, all these philosophical works, all these critical writings. In the long run, the body of work that he did produce is not by any means negligible.

*Cohen:* And yet all of his friends—and, after all, contemporaries know best about a man, I think—did have the feeling and did give the impression that all these things were shaken out of Coleridge's sloth, as it were—that he really had only to reach into his pocket to bring out treasures that would astound everyone. But you mentioned earlier Coleridge's interest in the ballad; of course, both Coleridge and Wordsworth were interested in the ballad—they called their era-creating volume of poetry *Lyrical Ballads*. That book was published in 1798 and it made a revolution in English poetry. It's interesting to look for a moment, I think, at what Coleridge actually did with the ballad. The ballad—even *Sir Patrick Spence* from which he quotes at the beginning of *Dejection*—is a very objective kind of thing. The balladist stands apart from his subject matter. He describes it to us as being in a world removed from him and from us. We contemplate it, we're moved by it, there's passion and emotion in it and these things move us, of course, but we don't feel they enter into our world. What Coleridge did—it was a feat, really, of pure inspiration—was to make the ballad lyrical. *The Ancient Mariner*, which is a pure ballad, is also a pure lyric.

*Walton:* Well, I don't know that *he* made it lyrical, because the ballad, almost by definition, is lyrical. But what he did was to bring the strange thing home to you, vivid and clear, by specific images, by



burning images, by things that graze his lines deep in in your consciousness. There's a whole extra dimension there that the ordinary ballad does not have.

*Cohen*: That's just the point. It was his change in the spirit of the ballad. The ordinary ballad does not have that because the characters and the scenes are at a remove, which comes to us through the balladist's own mind and eye. Whereas in *The Ancient Mariner* the effect is secured, I think, by the Mariner's being the narrator of the tale. He seizes on us as he seized on the Wedding-Guest, and he speaks directly to us.

*Walton*: And he makes it possible for you to identify yourself with the Mariner to some degree.

*Cohen*: Because he's there.

*Walton*: The Mariner stands for human loneliness, for the feelings of guilt that drive us all. You don't identify completely with him, but there is enough there so that it really catches your emotion. You shake, you tremble with the Mariner, you feel some sense of his experience on those frozen seas and in that deadened calm with the phosphorescent fishes all about. And this the Scotch balladeers and the traditional old English balladeers did not quite make you do. You read a strange story, often moving, but you are not *in* the story as Coleridge puts you in his.

*Cohen*: And here's how he's able to do it. You remember how the Mariner describes the coming of the skeleton ship and the death of the other crew members, after the shooting of the Albatross, and the Wedding-Guest suddenly starts up in terror and says:

*"I fear thee, ancient Mariner!  
I fear thy skinny hand!  
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,  
As is the ribbed sea-sand.*

*"I fear thee and thy glittering eye,  
And thy skinny hand, so brown."—  
"Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!  
This body dropt not down.*

*"Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
Alone on a wide wide sea!  
And never a saint took pity on  
My soul in agony.*

*"The many men, so beautiful!  
And they all dead did lie:  
And a thousand thousand slimy things  
Lived on; and so did I.*

*"I looked upon the rotting sea,  
And drew my eyes away;  
I looked upon the rotting deck,  
And there the dead men lay.*

*"I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;  
But or ever a prayer had gusht,  
A wicked whisper came, and made  
My heart as dry as dust.*

*I closed my lids, and kept them close,  
And the balls like pulses beat;  
But the sky and the sea, and the sea and  
the sky,  
Lay like a load on my weary eye,  
And the dead were at my feet.*

*"The cold sweat melted from their limbs,  
Nor rot nor reek did they:  
The look with which they looked on me  
Had never passed away.*

*"An orphan's curse would drag to hell  
A spirit from on high;  
But oh! more horrible than that  
Is the curse in a dead man's eye!  
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,  
And yet I could not die.*

*"The moving Moon went up the sky,  
And nowhere did abide:  
Softly she was going up,  
And a star or two beside."*

Certainly, in that last stanza "the moving Moon" is one of the miracles of poetic art.

*Walton:* One of the miracles of Coleridge's art is that he casts a spell on you just as the Mariner casts a spell on the Wedding-Guest; the Wedding-Guest *has* to listen whether he wants to or not—at first he doesn't want to—and Coleridge, in his better poems, *makes* you, the reader, listen too. You can't escape him.

*Cohen:* He does it through the living and real wonder of his enchantment—that is, he does what Mr. Bryson said it was his project to do at the beginning, to make scenes of enchantment real to us. And he does it also through seizing on and occupying and interesting our thoughts. There again I think that Coleridge illustrates what is his essential gift: his power to mingle reason and imagination, to bring together music and thought, and to make such an amalgam of them that we have no other word for it, really, but the voice of S. T. Coleridge.

*Walton:* The intellect is there behind everything. But the magic, the poetic spell, is so strong that even a fairly simple and fairly non-intellectual person can respond to Coleridge's greatest poems, and of how many poets can we say that? He's rare in that respect.

*Bryson:* I suspect that this amalgam of intellect and emotion may be a far more profound explanation of his failure to write more than a very few poems that attained this kind of incandescence than is



*O'Brien:* Yes, exactly. He starts with this holy man, Mael, who undertakes to set to rights a convent in the sea somewhere. But he drifts off his course and lands on an island of penguins instead.

*Bryson:* He's traveling in a stone boat.

*O'Brien:* Yes, that's a very important fact. Like St. Brendan and so many of the other medieval travelers, he travels almost magically—he has supernatural force behind him. And when he comes upon an island inhabited by creatures who look like little men in dress suits—his eyes are dazzled by the aurora borealis and he's very old, anyway—he naturally takes them for men. He doesn't understand their language, thinks he has discovered a primitive heathen tribe, and consequently baptizes them.

*Bryson:* And that does all the damage.

*Brogan:* You're right. I think the reason for my starting off with this political theme is that it's my business so to speak—I am a political scientist of that professional malformation, as the French would say. But even on the island of penguins the political theme comes in fairly soon; it comes in with the legend of the bogus hero, the man who's continually being deceived by his wife and yet is the hero, and it comes with the foundation of political society by a gangster who becomes a great national hero. But as I said before, there really are two books here. First, there's a long history of the human race as baptized penguins, with a lot of theology and a lot of ironical discussion of religion. And then, quite suddenly, the second half of the book becomes very contemporary—becomes France, becomes Paris, becomes the Dreyfus case, becomes something happening between 1894 and 1906; the book changes in tone, becomes less funny—more serious, if you like—and ends up with a pessimistic conclusion.

*Bryson:* It's true that there may be two books, but of course the baptism of the penguins—whom the saint takes for human beings and to whom he preaches—lays a kind of foundation in the basic stupidity of the human race which is going to help explain all these political corruptions and political confusions of the later years. But to me one of the most interesting things in the book, one of Anatole France's best inventions, is the debate in heaven caused by the baptism of a bunch of birds. They're birds—can they sin? If a bird can sin, it can go to hell—but it's after all just a bird. Now what do you do? Do you make them human beings? We can't remove the baptism.

*O'Brien:* That is one of the most fascinating discussions in the book: the conclave in heaven—presided over by God the Father, of course—with all of the saints present and each one having his word to say. One suggestion, for instance, is that the penguins be given human minds. There are, after all, plenty of monsters in the history of the world and in the beliefs of people; why couldn't the penguins have human minds and bird-like bodies? But that idea is rejected, and finally it's decided that the only solution is to give St. Mael the power to turn the penguins into men, because birds can't have souls.

*Bryson:* One of the typical Anatole France touches in it, Mr. O'Brien, is what happens to the birds when somebody drops a piece of cloth and one of the female penguins starts to drape herself. Modesty at that moment enters into the colony, and corruption begins.

*Brogan*: I think also it's characteristic of Anatole France that he grew up in a royalist, Catholic, erudite atmosphere—his father was a bookseller—and he always had this fancy for reversing the lives of the saints and Holy Writ. In the discussion in heaven he's careful to give the saints opinions appropriate to their own theological position. I mean that they're not chosen at random; he chooses saints who had views of this kind. It's a slight parody of a kind of discussion that might, in fact, have taken place—it's just on the edge of plausibility.

*Bryson*: And then, all of a sudden, we begin to move rapidly through history and we get this episode of the dragon, where the political meaning begins to be more concrete.

*Brogan*: I think the myth of the dragon is a satire on all nationalist theories of the origin of nations and states, because it's a trick; the dragon himself is not only an object of deception, he is deceived.

*Bryson*: He's a man who dresses himself to look like a dragon.

*Brogan*: Yes. But the dragon is not a completely conscious fraud because he himself is deceived in turn. It's not only that states are started by crooks, but by rather stupid crooks. All they require is force.

*Bryson*: And his wife, who deceives him in every way that a woman can deceive a man, becomes as time goes on—and this is one of the other themes—one of the great saints of this particular race.

*O'Brien*: Their patron saint.

*Bryson*: The patron saint of the people descended from the penguins. And, as a matter of fact, most of the thugs and harlots that you first see later on become saints, and then in the third round people begin to suspect that maybe they weren't saints after all. But how serious was Anatole France in suggesting that all authority rested upon force?

*Brogan*: I think it was a natural bias. He had two biases, if you like. One was an exaggerated bias against accepted legends. Therefore, for example, his life of Joan of Arc is like an immense amplification of this theme. But also he had a strong bias against authority of any kind, which starts with his school days. He was fascinated by authority as a problem; he was fascinated by the kind of man who could exercise authority, fascinated and horrified. The older he got the more he became convinced that authority was intrinsically bad (that didn't prevent him, in his old age, from falling for communism, which he saw in a gilded fashion at a distance). But again and again, it seems to me, not only in this book but in his others, he ends up with the belief that all state authority has a strong element of wickedness and tyranny and, above all, deceit in it.

*O'Brien*: And also all property. He states here quite clearly that the basis for all property is force. We see the primitive kings going about slugging each other with clubs, which reminds us of all of the stories about the foundations of monarchies and of new reigns and so on.

*Bryson*: That, after all, is one of the classic theories of the origin of government, isn't it?—that property was founded upon force, and government was founded upon property held by force. But what was puzzling me is how serious was this man? He seems to have been serious about the stupidity and corruption of humankind, but he

doesn't ever seem to be quite serious about a theory. And Anatole France was not a thinker in that sense, was he?

*Brogan*: He wasn't a thinker. In fact, he was very inconsistent and confused. But I think recent French studies of Anatole France have shown that these political views of his, muddled as they were, had pretty deep roots. They start earlier than the Dreyfus case, they start from his disillusionment with General Boulanger. In any case, the kind of people he was opposed to in France were the army and the Church, people based on tradition . . .

*O'Brien*: And authority.

*Brogan*: Yes, people who had the power to coerce others by being generals, by being bishops—people whose authority was based on what he thought were two false legends. One of them was the legend of Christian France, Joan of Arc, and so on; the other was the military legend, Napoleon—there's a long parody of Napoleon's career in this book. He thought France was suffering from two great curses, credulous belief in the Catholic religion, which he'd been brought up in, and credulous belief in French nationalism. So you get the parody of the lives of the saints and the parody of the nationalist saint, Napoleon. There are two different parodies involved.

*Bryson*: And under the two kinds of skepticism, what lay as the truth in his mind? Did he really reject Catholicism? Well, compare him with Voltaire, whom everybody thinks of as a kind of embodiment of the mocking side of the French spirit. Voltaire was always regarded as a very religious man who didn't like the clergy and didn't like the institutional Church. Was Anatole France that kind, or did he really reject all religious belief?

*Brogan*: Well, Anatole France was much less tough-minded a man than Voltaire and much less of a man of genius. The Church Militant annoyed him, I think more by being an ally of the army than in itself; I don't think his anti-clericalism was as strong as his anti-militarism.

*O'Brien*: I think that's a very good point, but Anatole France was anti-clerical and I should think even anti-religious in a profounder sense than Renan was. That is, he went further than Renan did.

*Bryson*: Renan wasn't a satirist, and this man was. This man had fun with what he was doing.

*O'Brien*: Decidedly, he had fun—and that's apparent throughout this book as it is throughout his others, many of which could be placed on a higher level than this one, even.

*Bryson*: But what about the other side of it: did he give up patriotism in the same way that he gave up religion?

*Brogan*: I think he did it more deeply. In 1914 he made a foolish gesture—he was then seventy or so—by volunteering for the army, but nobody took him seriously.

*Bryson*: He walked out with a gun over his shoulder . . .

*Brogan*: That was an act. But very quickly, as you can see from contemporary records, he fell back into his skepticism. His hatred of military authority was deep. He thought soldiers were stupid, murderous, dishonest; if you look at this book all the way through, even the erring saints are treated more amiably and affectionately than the

soldiers, who are treated with uniform hostility. There's no kindness about the pictures of the soldiers, of Napoleon, of Boulanger.

*O'Brien*: I can't forget that delightful touch at the end of the section dealing with Napoleon—under another name, of course—when one of the crippled inhabitants of Penguinia tells the story of how that great man conquered half the world for them and then lost it all; now the country is inhabited entirely by the descendants of cripples and dim-witted people who were not good for military service, he says, "but he gave us glory and fame."

*Bryson*: Anatole France could be passionately pacifistic and hate the army as an institution, and still love his country?

*Brogan*: Well, yes, he could . . .

*Bryson*: I'm not saying he *did*, Mr. Brogan. But I'm interested because the way a satirist has fun with sacred things may be a little equivocal as an index to what he really thinks.

*Brogan*: I think he loved his country, or at least loved a great deal in his country—including, oddly enough, the French Church. And his love for the French Church—which stems from his being the scion of an extremely royalist family as well as a Catholic family—comes out in the amount of loving care he devotes to producing plausible versions of sacred legends. Whereas his military history is just simple, naïve. For example, one would never gather from Anatole France that Napoleon was a first-class writer of French prose, and quite as clever a man of letters as Anatole France—cleverer, even. Whereas if Napoleon had been a bishop, Anatole France would have appreciated—as he did with Bossuet or with any of the great French ecclesiastical writers, even if he disagreed with them—his literary merits and other merits. But for soldiers he had a great blind spot. For example, you can't distinguish between Napoleon and General Boulanger in this book, but they were very different types.

*O'Brien*: Very different, yes.

*Bryson*: Well, if this satire—which oscillates between just fooling and real bitterness—shows his real thinking, how much of it was due to his violent, passionate reaction to the Dreyfus case?

*O'Brien*: Oh, a great deal of it; there was, after all, give-and-take there. He entered the Dreyfus case because he felt as he did, but the case itself certainly intensified his own feelings. And here we must say that Anatole France has given us a parable of the Dreyfus case in one of the longest and certainly most memorable sections of *Penguin Island*.

*Bryson*: I think it's necessary always to recall what that case was about. It's always talked about, it's always referred to as a period of great strain and real tragedy in French life. But I find that people get mixed up on whether it was a mere case of anti-Semitism—which of course it was, in part—or a case of corruption in high places. Now what does modern scholarship think really happened?

*O'Brien*: Mr. Brogan is certainly the man to answer that question.

*Brogan*: Well, it was undoubtedly anti-Semitic in great part and a great deal of the passion was provoked by that.

*Bryson:* Yes, the captain who was falsely accused of treachery was a Jew.

*Brogan:* And I think we may take it as almost certain that he would not have been accused if he hadn't been a Jew. But what I think is significant is that it became a bigger case because the defenders of the army advocated stopping the case even if he were innocent, as Barrès would say, because the issue was the survival of the French Army. And any man, Jew or Christian, wasn't as important as that. They didn't care whether he was guilty or not: it was necessary that the authority of the court-martial should be maintained. Anatole France himself was rather anti-Semitic in many ways—the Jews who appear in his books are usually treated with some hostility—but what infuriated him, and gave him probably the only element of genuine political passion in his life, was the doctrine that the state was so important that any man should be sacrificed to it. He thought any man was more important than any state because the state was corrupt, tyrannical, dishonest, and mendacious; it was possible to have a good man but impossible to have a good state.

*Bryson:* We're getting pretty close to home now, aren't we?

*Brogan:* And the accepted view, that the only duty of a good citizen is to support state authority, was what offended the deeply anarchistic tradition which Anatole France represented; you get it in Proudhon; you get it, in a sense, in Voltaire. And that was what forced Anatole France to ally himself with people like Zola, whom he disliked as a man and disliked as an author. In this book you find an interesting passage in which the honest leader discovers to his horror that his allies are just as bad and tiresome and brutal and stupid as his enemies. Well, that was what Anatole France's own experience was.

*Bryson:* He got beaten up by both sides.

*Brogan:* The one view he never gives up is that individual men and women can be worth something, that men and women in the mass are always inferior to the best of individuals.

*O'Brien:* And hence he was an anarchist.

*Brogan:* Exactly.

*Bryson:* This is what I was thinking of when I asked whether he didn't really love his country. In other words, he was deeply hurt by what seemed to him a wickedness on the part of the institutions that made up France. He didn't like the army and he didn't especially like the Church. He hated to see the French people, as a people, doing something that to him was unjust and shameful—isn't that right?

*O'Brien:* That certainly is right. And his picture of the Dreyfus case here, in the guise of a man who sells 80,000 bales of hay, which it turns out never existed . . .

*Bryson:* That's the corruption that the man is accused of.

*O'Brien:* It's what he's accused of, and it's a very good transposition of the selling of military secrets to a foreign power. And then Zola, disguised as a writer who comes in from the outside to defend the supposed hay-seller, is admirably depicted here—but we also see that Anatole France does not wholly admire Zola.

*Bryson:* And isn't it true that, as time has gone on, Zola has got



most of the credit for his intervention on behalf of justice, while people have more or less forgotten that Anatole France himself took a good deal of risk?

*O'Brien*: As most of the writers of his time did—Anatole France to a greater extent than many of the others; he certainly went out on a limb in a number of instances to defend Dreyfus.

*Bryson*: Underneath the satire there's something that he really cared for. Is that always true of a satirist? Is that what we always find if we dig down under the fooling and the cynicism?

*O'Brien*: Yes, I should think so. And the accusations of dilettantism and superficiality and so on that have been applied to Anatole France, while justified in the main, do not answer the entire question. They don't cover the man.

*Brogan*: I think that's very true. I think there's deep passion for individual people. All through his books runs the figure of the man who's put upon, the boy or the woman or the poor man who's kicked around. One of the reasons why he turned stupidly to communism at the end of his life was his horror of the first World War, the spectacle of the Third Republic demanding and getting far greater sacrifices—as he said more than once—than Napoleon ever asked for. The Third Republic killed more Frenchmen than Napoleon did—and quicker—and it caused far more ruin, so that Anatole France's pessimism became deeper and deeper the older he got. The first World War only confirmed the terrible premonitions he had at the end of *Penguin Island*; he discovered again that any state, even the Republic which had pardoned and acquitted Dreyfus, and had repented of its sins, turned out to be as wicked as Napoleon. So that he ended up where he so started: believing that individuals could be something but men in the mass, organized in the mass, were usually bad and always dangerous.

*Bryson*: There's a very deep tragedy in that—in his feeling that institutions could win men's loyalties even against their moral convictions. We find even today—I think you can observe it in the United States—a lot of people who say yes, this one person is being sacrificed, his rights are being trampled on, but after all we must protect the government and the machinery of the government; even if it's unjust to this one man, it doesn't really matter because the authority of the army or the country or the state or the courts must be upheld.

*Brogan*: That's what Anatole France would have thought was the great sin, the great political heresy—in which the baptized Americans, like the baptized penguins, forget their baptism and make the state, which at very best was an instrument, into an end. Once you begin to do that, you are just as blind as all the baptized penguins were or as the French people became; you can be quite certain of the value of the dignity and honesty and life of an individual, but you're going to be very doubtful indeed, if you look at history coldly, about the value of these collective concepts which people call the Nation, the State, Authority, or National Safety.

*Bryson*: For which we are supposed to die?

*Brogan*: For which we are supposed to die.

*Bryson*: And, if necessary, kill . . .

*Brogan*: Make other people die, on a great scale.

*O'Brien*: Isn't that why Anatole France, at the end of this novel—which after all is made up of bits and pieces with a certain amount of disorganization apparent to any reader—brings us to a vision of the future, which is rather like those many visions of the future that we've had in our own literature for the past twenty years?

*Bryson*: Catastrophe.

*O'Brien*: A catastrophic and abhorrent picture of the world to come, which, as a matter of fact, doesn't seem to us quite so horrible because it's rather like the world we live in.

*Bryson*: That's the most pessimistic remark you could make; his predictions seem to you rather less terrible than the fact?

*Brogan*: I agree with Mr. O'Brien. I think that we've got used to a degree of universal brutality which would really have startled Anatole France. What was all this fuss about one captain in the army charged with treason, compared with the holocaust of trials, massacres, concentration camps, condemnations, rehabilitations, confessions, and recantations that has since become commonplace? Nothing that he could have foreseen when he finished this book in 1908 could possibly have lived up to the realities of the last twenty years—leaving out the atom bomb, which actually is implied in this book; he has only dynamite to destroy the world with, but we've got atomic fission.

*Bryson*: It's evident that in your opinion this tragic contrast between the morality and heroism possible to the individual, and the wickedness inherent in institutions, has been getting wider rather than narrower. In other words, men themselves have not been going down so fast, but their institutions have been degraded at a tremendous rate.

## VOLTAIRE

### Candide

(As broadcast September 23, 1956)

BERGEN EVANS

• CHARLES FRANKEL

• LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: The strange landscape that Voltaire described in *Candide* is a landscape of violence and trouble; a group of quite nice people go through unimaginable horrors and finally, by some series of miracles, survive to settle down and make the best of life.

*Frankel*: There are a couple of paradoxes about the book. The first is that in spite of the violence and misery on every page, it is a marvelously funny book; the second is that its author—who was one of the most effective reformers, I suppose, the world has ever seen—wrote a book in which he tells us that misery is inevitable and incurable in the human condition.

*Bryson*: Do you think he's really saying that misery is incurable, that he isn't making fun of the people who think it's incurable?

*Frankel*: It's a complicated business. Voltaire wrote the book because he was irritated by the then fashionable philosophical doctrine that this is the best of all possible worlds . . .

*Evans*: If I may interrupt, that doctrine is unavoidable if you accept certain premises. And he, in questioning the doctrine—as you know better than I—was questioning very profound assumptions of his time.

*Bryson*: And of ours, too?

*Evans*: I believe so, yes.

*Bryson*: What are they?

*Evans*: If you accept the infra-goodness of God and the all-powerfulness of God, it seems to me that any questioning of the perfection of this world challenges one or the other of those acceptances.

*Bryson*: Either God is not all-good or God is not all-powerful?

*Evans*: Yes, that's what it leads to.

*Bryson*: And of course when Voltaire was writing, in the eighteenth century, you didn't dare question them aloud, even if in your heart you did. What's he getting at, then?

*Frankel*: He's getting at one hifalutin philosophical way of presenting this logical dilemma—as though it weren't a dilemma; you dress up the words in new terms, and you get out of it.

*Bryson*: This is another word for philosophical discourse.

*Frankel*: No, it's what *some* philosophers do; other philosophers try to prevent them from doing it, and that's perhaps what keeps philosophy going.

*Evans*: Do you feel, Mr. Frankel, that *Candide* is an unfair attack on Leibniz?

*Frankel*: I think it's an unfair attack in the sense that it obviously isn't a logical refutation of Leibniz. A defender of Leibniz could say "Oh now, come, come—Leibniz never meant to say that this is the best of all possible worlds in the sense in which you, Voltaire, are taking it." Nevertheless, I think it's a fair hit because Voltaire takes it the way normal people take it, and if Leibniz didn't mean what normal people mean, he oughtn't have used normal language.

*Bryson*: Few philosophers do, Mr. Frankel; they generally escape that.

*Evans*: It's not a fault of philosophers that the common man can only interpret them in his own terminology.

*Bryson*: Of course, Leibniz is the root of the whole thing—isn't he?—and in this story he's Dr. Pangloss.

*Frankel*: Who glosses over everything . . .

*Bryson*: A pun on the meaning of the word. But Voltaire has this old man saying that it's the best of all possible worlds, so don't worry. And then he and his young disciple, Candide, and the girl that Candide loves, Cunégonde, start out on a series of perfectly incredible adventures in which they are enslaved, mutilated, robbed, assaulted, and in every other way punished—while Pangloss goes right on saying this is the best of all possible worlds.

*Evans*: You say "this perfectly incredible series of adventures."

I view *Candide* as a sort of parable of life: all life is perfectly incredible.

*Bryson*: But it doesn't all happen to the same person, Mr. Evans.

*Evans*: Yes, I think it does.

*Frankel*: But not so much violence! This is a story that's impossible to summarize.

*Evans*: He simply telescopes life.

*Frankel*: *Candide* gets caught in the middle of a battle; five thousand are killed on one side, six thousand on the other, and *Candide* has to pull himself out from under mountains of corpses. Now this doesn't happen in real life . . .

*Evans*: But we're all survivors—otherwise we wouldn't be here.

*Frankel*: Yes, that's true.

*Bryson*: But we don't all see as much violence as there is in this book. Did the people in the eighteenth century see it? Did *they* think this was a real picture of the world?

*Evans*: I suspect they saw much more *little* violence than we do—more beatings, more fighting in the street. There were no police. In the big violences our world exceeds theirs, I'd say.

*Frankel*: Ours is legal violence, usually institutionalized violence—and that's what we're afraid of, that's what worries us. What they saw was "illegal" violence, breaches of law or disease or death.

*Evans*: They saw the Lisbon earthquake.

*Frankel*: Oh, they saw natural disasters, but they didn't have to wait for the Lisbon earthquake—they saw people dying of horrible diseases every day of their lives.

*Bryson*: But in *Candide* the violences that are used to make fun of Pangloss's "best of all possible worlds" are virtually all deliberately inflicted on one human being by another, and generally unjustly.

*Frankel*: Yes, almost always; it's just sheer meaningless violence for the love of it, apparently. I think this is part of Voltaire's shrewdness. It isn't as though there was some moral meaning behind it—because then it *might* be the best of all possible worlds; but it's really just frivolity, it's superfluous, it's the grace note that evil adds to everything.

*Evans*: Now, this young man, *Candide*, starting out like every little *Candide*—I have two *Candides* at home; it wrings my heart to see the simplicity of them . . .

*Frankel*: You're very lucky to have two *Candides*!

*Evans*: They start out in life and eventually get their teeth knocked out. At what point does *Candide* decide Pangloss is wrong?

*Bryson*: He doesn't ever, does he?

*Evans*: I think at the very end.

*Frankel*: I think the doubts begin to grow on him when he's made love to Cunégonde and is expelled from the castle of Thunder-tronckh.

*Bryson*: He made love to Cunégonde because Pangloss set him the example by making love to one of the maids. And *Candide* thought, well, Cunégonde and he—after all, they were good friends; why not? And he gets kicked out.

*Frankel*: Cunégonde meets with outrage and Pangloss catches a repellent disease.

*Bryson*: Most of his features drop off, but he still thinks it's the best of all possible worlds.

*Evans*: Isn't Cunégonde a young man's ideal? She falls in love with a young man, he suffers all of this for her, and when he finally gets her, she's a pretty battered creature—but he ends up supporting the ideal, somewhat reluctantly.

*Bryson*: How is it that this satire has had almost the same impact on successive generations, when the things that Voltaire described had gone more and more out of men's lives?

*Evans*: Because Pangloss is immortal. Successive generations have been taught that this is the best of all possible worlds.

*Bryson*: And it never is?

*Evans*: They have to find out painfully that there are apparently limitations.

*Frankel*: There's a deeper element in it than that. It isn't as though everyone had to read Leibniz to believe that "it's the best of all possible worlds." But I think almost everyone hangs on awfully hard to the belief that the world is somehow his personal oyster, that the things that happen have a meaning, that things will work out either all right or there'll be a moral justification when they work out wrong. You get a jolt from *Candide* when you read it, and the jolt is marvelously liberating. You see, there's something callous about a view that this is the best of all possible worlds; it really, in effect, says "well, let's not look at the way people feel, let's not take human values seriously, let's gloss over suffering and violence."

*Evans*: But doesn't every child, of necessity, get an unfairly favorable view of life? He has to: you protect him.

*Frankel*: I'm afraid I know some children who haven't had that good fortune, Mr. Evans.

*Evans*: Some may, but not too many in our society. And Voltaire was writing for the élite.

*Frankel*: There are untold horrors even in nice, comfortable homes.

*Evans*: That could be, but still they are spiritual and psychological horrors.

*Frankel*: Yes, that's true—it's not physical violence.

*Bryson*: You don't grasp what Voltaire's getting at unless you realize that these are not the psychological cruelties that a modern writer might use, such as you have in Henry James, for instance; it isn't that sort of thing at all. This is deliberate, brutal, external cruelty.

*Frankel*: But it's a little exaggerated to say it quite that way, because it's all paper cruelty, paper violence. You entertain the idea purely in your head; Voltaire never wants you or invites you to entertain it in your belly.

*Bryson*: That's what I want to get at, Mr. Frankel. It seems to me that's very well put. How does Voltaire give you such a catalogue of horrors without at any time giving you what a modern blurb-writer would call "the thrill of raw emotion"?

*Frankel*: Well, first of all, it's a marvelously paced book. You go right through these horrors as though you were recounting . . .

*Evans*: A comic strip.

*Frankel*: Yes. Candide is walking to the corner and on the way down he loses his leg; he has a wooden leg put on, continues with his journey, and that's that. And this goes on page after page.

*Evans*: The wooden leg even catches fire. But you don't believe in it for one minute, actually.

*Bryson*: You're not emotionally touched.

*Evans*: But you know, the intellectual of all times divorces himself as best he can from emotional responsibilities. He must—for his own self-protection. If you gave way and felt these things, you would dissolve in horror.

*Frankel*: Voltaire lets himself go at certain times. He seems most venomous not when he's describing the horrible tortures that the Turks can inflict on people, but rather when he describes the way critics behave in Paris or the intellectuals vie with one another in cheap and malicious ways. It's the spiritual and moral evils that really seem to irritate him.

*Bryson*: He's pretty hard on the Inquisition.

*Frankel*: Yes, awfully hard. It's the intellectually motivated deception, the cruelty that comes from fanaticism or from self deception—that's what's gets him down.

*Evans*: Yes, he is as angry at the Inquisition for its stupidity as for its cruelty. Of course, the two are inseparable in his mind.

*Frankel*: It's *just* that: the combination of cruelty and elaborate, hifalutin, philosophized stupidity.

*Evans*: As in that wonderful scene of deduction, where a man says that he doesn't like bacon around his steak and they deduce at once that he's a heretic.

*Frankel*: In a way that's an answer to the basic paradox of the book, which is why this great reformer should write a book to demonstrate the incurability of evil. What, in effect, he was trying to do was to fight the *unnecessary* evil that men bring into the world when they intellectualize or fanaticize their wills or desires, when they try to connect their own private goods with the total pushing pressure.

*Bryson*: You know, I believe Mr. Frankel is setting some philosophic traps for us.

*Evans*: Well, I'm prepared to rush right into them. It seems to me that Voltaire says humorously what Ibsen says with such powerful seriousness: that real evil, to be effective, must be disguised as idealism; that is, not until you're a real fanatic will you be *really* cruel. Only the man who is sure that he has the absolute answer is willing to destroy his fellow men wholesale. Voltaire laughs at the absurdity of this, while Ibsen shouts with anger.

*Frankel*: Expecting very little, really, of the human race, expecting very little of the human condition, Voltaire nevertheless thinks you can attain something if only you get rid of self-induced cruelty and stupidity.

*Evans*: Well, he must have expected something of the human race because he does keep Candide, as the name implies, sweet and

frank and open all through the book. *Candide* is good at the beginning, good at the end.

*Bryson*: Mr. Evans, put *Candide* into our present scene. You said, and Mr. Frankel agreed with you, that we've lost all this little street corner violence but we have the threat of catastrophic violence over our heads. Doesn't the young man of today live with just as much innocent freedom from anxiety as *Candide* did? You see these boys rushing around in their automobiles—they don't expect to be smashed up.

*Frankel*: They also are young men who haven't studied philosophy—not with Pangloss, at any rate.

*Bryson*: I'm not so sure about that. I'd like to see some figures on the incidence of automobile accidents among philosophers.

*Evans*: I imagine it's very low.

*Bryson*: Yes, because they can't afford automobiles. But this is a very serious question with me. These boys who go rushing around in speedy cars, these boys who go out to be shot in a war—they don't expect that violence will touch them. What's the basis of this innocence?

*Frankel*: You always imagine, I suppose, that you're the exception. The reality of it is there, but it's not a personal reality. That's the way we keep ourselves going.

*Evans*: Violence of so abrupt a nature will not give an account of itself.

*Bryson*: You can't tell what happened—it comes too fast.

*Frankel*: It never really touches *Candide*; it touches him only to the extent that he can report the fact and can say "Ah, Pangloss, if you were here you'd have difficulty explaining this!" It never touches him so that he lives with it.

*Bryson*: But Pangloss always does arrive, sooner or later—after all, these people all survive, they're all there at the end cultivating their garden. Pangloss always does offer an explanation, he always says "this is still the best of all possible worlds."

*Evans*: He is still able to talk. You remember the passage in *King Lear* where someone says "This is the worst that could happen to me," and someone else says "The worst is not, so long as we can say 'This is the worst.'"

*Frankel*: Is the worst not to be able to comment on it, not to be able to talk?

*Evans*: That's a philosopher's idea of the worst.

*Bryson*: As well as any professor's view. Well, I want to know how *Candide* keeps this sweetness. To me he's not changed at all by his experience. He is the real philosopher in the book.

*Frankel*: Yes, but are you supposed to believe in him? Isn't he, after all, the basic invention that Voltaire needed? It's so simple and so straight-forward you don't realize what a really remarkable invention it is. Even the name, *Candide*, suggests a simple, candid way of looking at the world.

*Evans*: That's the pessimistic philosopher who says the good man is simply a fictional invention. One must have him for the plot, but he doesn't really exist.

*Bryson*: You think Voltaire didn't mean us to believe in Candide at all?

*Frankel*: I think he perhaps hoped that we would all hope for Candide, but not believe in him.

*Bryson*: What about the beautiful Cunégonde, who had so many evil things happen to her that in the end she's just a kind of sere and yellow leaf? How does it happen that Candide still loves her?

*Frankel*: You mean when she's ugly? He doesn't.

*Bryson*: But he puts up with her, he says let's have her around.

*Evans*: She's a symbol of his ideals. Your ideals become faded but shame won't let you admit it and you put up with whatever they've got you into.

*Frankel*: You're both complicating it. How the devil could he get rid of her?

*Bryson*: Other people have got rid of her in various ways.

*Frankel*: I know, but Candide can't—there are old attachments there. If you've pledged your faith to a lady, the lady is likely to hold you to it. And, indeed, that's just what Voltaire says.

*Evans*: But poor old Candide ends up really supporting the lot, doesn't he?

*Bryson*: Yes, all of them. But he seems to be enjoying it, he's cultivating his garden.

*Evans*: Yes, he's doing the best he can in those final circumstances.

*Bryson*: Now we've got the common-sense answer that I'm sure Voltaire wanted us to find. But I think we're letting the philosophers out much too easy. Let's go back to Leibniz, or Dr. Pangloss as he's called in this book. What's the matter with philosophers, anyhow, Mr. Frankel?

*Frankel*: You would ask me that!

*Bryson*: To put it brutally, you are one. How does it happen that philosophers have such a habit of saying things, as Leibniz does here, which to the common, ordinary man's understanding seem to mean something startling and strange—and then a professional philosopher comes along and says "Oh, no, that isn't what he meant at all, he meant something far more subtle and difficult and believable than that"? Leibniz *seemed* to say "this is the best of all possible worlds."

*Frankel*: It's a long, long story how philosophers get to do that sort of thing.

*Bryson*: And yet they do.

*Frankel*: I say some do. Others deplore it so mightily that they become philosophers to try to refute the first kind. But I myself think that there have been, unfortunately, too many philosophers who have said things that strike people as remarkably original because people, including other philosophers, interpret these statements as though they were in ordinary everyday language. In fact, they're not. The philosopher doesn't mean anything of the kind.

*Evans*: I have never thought of philosophers as sensation-mongers.

*Frankel*: Oh, intellectual sensation-mongers, of course!

*Bryson*: To a very small and select audience.



*Frankel*: I don't necessarily mean that they do it on purpose. I said very early, I think, in our conversation today that people like to believe the world's their oyster. Well, philosophy for some people is an elaborate attempt to—oh, Bertrand Russell says it some place: philosophy is an unusually ingenious attempt to think fallaciously. A philosopher is usually a pretty sensible man. The facts stare him in the face. Leibniz knew all the facts that Voltaire did and they bothered him, they bothered him so much that he had to make up very elaborate reasons. The ordinary fellow just has to make up simple reasons to get around the facts.

*Evans*: Well, do you think Pangloss is sensation-mongering?

*Frankel*: Pangloss? Oh no, he's a professor of philosophy, not a real philosopher. He's just passing on what he picked up. But, mind you, I think there are some good philosophers, first-rate philosophers. If there weren't professional philosophers, ordinary human beings would manufacture illusions.

*Bryson*: Well, let's go back to Leibniz. Here's a man who, unless all the best judges are mistaken, had one of the three or four—let's say one of the few—finest intellects the world has ever produced.

*Frankel*: He's one of the great geniuses.

*Bryson*: All right, that's exactly the paradox that I want to explore. Here's one of the greatest of the world's geniuses; I suppose we don't yet know by half the extent to which modern science derives out of the thinking of Leibniz—they're still digging up manuscripts and finding that he anticipated this, that he anticipated that . . .

*Frankel*: He foresaw modern logic; he helped to invent, or at least completed the invention of the calculus, and so forth and so on.

*Bryson*: All right. Here's one of the supreme intellects—those are the terms that Russell applies to him—and he's silly. Now this paradox is a familiar one. Can you explain it?

*Frankel*: No, I don't think it's a paradox. Why should a man who's extremely good in some things be immune to the common human taint of silliness?

*Evans*: But I think he was caught unavoidably in this position.

*Frankel*: Well, he didn't have to hold those assumptions, did he?

*Evans*: No man—however great—escapes wholly from the basic concepts of his time.

*Frankel*: But, Mr. Evans, there were others in his time who didn't hold quite that point of view.

*Bryson*: They weren't librarians to kings.

*Frankel*: No, that's true. And, of course, again you will have to say "Leibniz didn't mean anything so simple as the doctrine that Voltaire refuted." But again I say "Well, if he didn't, then he oughtn't to have made it appear as though he did."

*Bryson*: Do you accept the idea that Bertrand Russell has been so busily advocating now for twenty years or so?—that Leibniz had two philosophies, one a secret philosophy that he hid in his desk drawer so nobody would find it and get him into trouble, and the other a popular philosophy that he thought would keep his job at the Court of Hanover?

*Frankel*: I don't know. I think Russell knows a good deal more

about Leibniz than I do. Voltaire, however, probably understood in his own time the impact of that philosophy, and it's worth repeating that Leibniz was a good whipping boy. But the doctrine was around as it probably always is. You know, it's not really very different from the fashionable doctrine of today—that this is really the *worst* of all possible worlds and that we're condemned to unutterable evil and sin and can't do anything about it. Indeed, it's the same doctrine. You listen to Pangloss as he tries to defend the goodness of things in the face of these terrible disasters and you say "Well, if this is the best of all possible worlds, what an awful, awful creation it must be!" It's a made-up metaphysical gloominess, and it's a made-up metaphysical optimism that Voltaire satirizes.

*Evans*: There'd be a very easy story then, wouldn't there, in a young man who comes out of college and finds that life is rather pleasant?

*Bryson*: I think a modern Voltaire might do something with that. But what about this common-sense solution that it's necessary to cultivate one's garden? That's what it all comes down to.

*Evans*: It seems to me a very fine, practical solution. That is, that you must find some work within the sphere of your abilities—not too great; don't undertake anything vaguely mighty because you will fail, but take some little thing you can do—and do it. Then work becomes an increasing solace as you get older.

*Frankel*: Of course Voltaire undertook mighty jobs, but he didn't expect to change the world as a result of them. I think that's what you mean. You might take on a terribly difficult job, but don't expect that you're doing more than cultivating your own garden. And, for goodness' sake, do it because it's pleasant and because it doesn't do any great mischief; don't do it in order to do good to the world, because those are the fellows who do the greatest evil.

*Bryson*: There's also the fact Voltaire didn't have to *ask* anybody. There's the old story about the young musician who went to some great conductor and said "Do you think, sir, I'm old enough to compose?" The man said "Well, how do I know? What do *you* think about it?" The youth replied: "Well, I don't know. I'm twenty-five years old and I understand Mozart began at seven." And the man said "Yes, but Mozart didn't have to ask anybody." But here we have a complicated philosophical proposition that was too difficult for people to understand, and so a great satirist catches the philosopher vulnerable and attacks him and gives us a common-sense answer. Will it always happen that way?

*Evans*: I hope that's what satirists are for, to correct. The function of a moralist, Johnson says, is "to detect the frauds of fortune." And if the philosophers help support the frauds of fortune, then it's up to the moralist; the popular moralist has his innings, and I hope when he does . . .

*Frankel*: Occasionally a philosophical moralist might, too. The real difficulty is that Voltaire is a great deal funnier than the ordinary philosopher who criticizes him, and so it sticks better; it may not be as good logically but it's awfully effective morally.

*Bryson*: But this is an appalling thought, Mr. Frankel. What

would happen to academic philosophy if some philosopher was funny?

*Frankel*: It would be very much improved. So long as he was intentionally funny, of course. I think a great many philosophers have been unintentionally funny.

*Bryson*: Much as you can be awed by the extraordinary range and depth and acuteness of Leibniz's intellect, as anybody is who tries to read him, I think there's something else. It's a kind of warmth in our response to a man who can be as deft and swift and funny and penetrating as Voltaire, and I wouldn't be surprised if width to the extent that Voltaire had it is almost as rare a thing as depth to the extent that Leibniz had it.

*Frankel*: I think it should be said, too, that Voltaire had intellect—it's a different kind of intellect, but it's a marvelous kind. It's the kind of intellect that takes an abstraction and turns it into a concrete thing.

*Bryson*: And leaves it bright and sparkling even today.

## WILLIAM BLAKE

### Poems

(As broadcast September 30, 1956)

ANNE FREMANTLE • JOHN A. THOMPSON JR. • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: The landscape in which Blake seemed to be a familiar citizen was the landscape of a kind of heavenly future in which most people would find themselves extraordinarily uncomfortable. Blake lived there all his life—that's what made him so strange, I suppose.

*Fremantle*: Well, Mr. Bryson, he started early, didn't he? When he was four years old. His wife reminded him, as an old man, that he'd first seen God looking through the window of the carriage when he was a child. He was quite frightened, but as he grew older he got familiar with that strange face that was always looking in at windows.

*Bryson*: And in anybody else this would seem to us just mere eccentricity or else a kind of curious over-estimation of his own importance in the cosmic scheme.

*Thompson*: I think it was just an early example of his ability to visualize, to see things concretely. I should say that the strange landscape in which he lived was really the landscape of his own time, which he saw more clearly than other people.

*Bryson*: Well, the London of the late eighteenth century was not a landscape in which most people saw God poke His head through a carriage window.

*Thompson*: That's true, but they did not see other things that Blake saw. He saw the jail for what it was; he saw the soldier for what he was, a suffering man; he saw the harlot; he saw what the

child was. And these things the people around him simply couldn't recognize.

*Fremantle:* But Blake was a real mystic. That is to say, he always lived on three levels at once. We all live in this world and some of us live downstairs, unfortunately, but very few of us get upstairs. Blake had a wonderful faculty of looking out of the top windows while living in this world, while living very committed to his own time. He was committed against war, he felt very strongly about the French Revolution, and things like that. But he also had his excursions downstairs, like others of us, into this underworld where he saw the evil things of his time for what they were.

*Bryson:* But are you suggesting, when you say he went downstairs, that he merely *saw* that there was evil in the world or that he had some sympathy with it?

*Fremantle:* No, I would say that he had no sympathy at all with evil, but he had enormous sympathy with the people who did evil. I think he felt that all evil, as we know it, is energy misused. The *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* are statements that the evil lies in the way the energy is canalized, never in the thing itself.

*Thompson:* I should say it's rather in the fact that the energy is suppressed, that it's not used, that it finds no channel for expression; and that it was the doctrine of the church and the politics of his time that he felt was suppressing it. But your upstairs and downstairs puzzles me a bit . . .

*Bryson:* Don't forget that Mrs. Fremantle mentioned an intermediate floor where most of us are most of the time.

*Thompson:* Well, I think that Blake was protesting against just such a division of experience. Downstairs seems to carry with it some connotation that it's not as good a place to be as upstairs, and my feeling is that Blake protested very much against this.

*Fremantle:* I think perhaps I ought to make myself clear. I think upstairs was the level at which he lived when he saw Ezekiel as a small child . . .

*Bryson:* He thought he saw Ezekiel.

*Fremantle:* He *knew* he saw Ezekiel.

*Thompson:* Yes, I think he knew he saw Ezekiel. I don't believe Ezekiel was there, but I think Blake saw him.

*Fremantle:* I think you probably know less about Ezekiel than Blake, Mr. Thompson.

*Thompson:* I'm sure I do.

*Bryson:* But that's a very difficult kind of argument, Mrs. Fremantle. As far as I know, the only joke in Plato is when he says "A man who claims divine ancestry must be telling the truth, because he would know more about it than anybody else."

*Fremantle:* Blake was rather on that level, wasn't he? He knew that when he said he saw Ezekiel his mother would spank him, but he didn't seem to mind about it; and he went on through life being perfectly aware of the spanking, on the ordinary level, and perfectly aware of Ezekiel. And I think that's one of the things about the real mystic, that he doesn't muddle things up; he's the opposite of Wordsworth.

*Thompson*: Again I don't understand, quite, your distinction between upstairs and downstairs, or this muddling-up of things. I think Blake didn't muddle things up but put them very much together; he made a great point of showing contrary states, as in the title *Songs of Innocence and of Experience Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*. They appear distinct, and yet always together. It is the separation of innocence from experience or of experience from innocence that, I suppose, he would object to.

*Fremantle*: What I really meant was that he was always against the things that were evil. He was always against the poor little chimney sweepers' having to go up the dark chimneys; he was always against the harlot's having to earn a living that way; he was always against war; or "A Robin Redbreast in a Cage/ Puts all Heaven in a Rage." That's downstairs, always. But "Think thou canst not sigh a sigh,/ And thy Maker is not by?/ Think thou canst not weep a tear,/ and thy Maker is not near?"—that's upstairs. Is that a little more clear?

*Bryson*: It's clear. I'm not sure it describes Blake, because Blake, it seems to me, is very near to being ineffable. If he is a true mystic, then whether or not he keeps the real world (in the ordinary sense of the term) distinct from the world which only he can see into, he *does* see a world into which nobody else can look. That is, nobody who isn't a mystic like himself—and mystics don't seem to agree on the geography of that unseen world very much. But he does have some ideas about evil in the world which seems to me worth looking at; he felt very deeply the evil in the world.

*Fremantle*: And he felt it in the terms of the people who he thought did it. He hated, for instance, Voltaire and Rousseau. No one's been more scathing about them.

*Thompson*: Yes, but at the same time he said that Paine was a better Christian, you remember, than the Christian apologists, and he thought that Voltaire and Rousseau also did useful work. He was very much opposed to the church of his time, to the political structure of his time, and to just about everything else in his time.

*Bryson*: He presents the familiar problem of the man who is deeply concerned with religious issues, but who is violently hostile to the organized agency of religion of his day.

*Fremantle*: Well, he was a good anti-clerical, certainly. But I think, even more, he was against—as he put it himself—"single vision." He wanted people to see things in their great complexity. For instance, at the beginning of the *Auguries of Innocence* he says:

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand,  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And Eternity in an hour.*

*Thompson*: Yes, I agree that he was to that extent a mystic. But he was not a mystic—at least in my lay understanding of the term—to the extent of being disdainful of the body or attempting to leave the body and reach some universal experience that would leave the particulars of experience out. It is his strength and his ability to bring

the particulars of experience before us very vividly in his poems that makes him memorable.

*Fremantle*: But I think you're confusing a mystic and an ascetic, because some mystics are ascetics but not all ascetics are mystics. In fact, unfortunately, only too few. Wouldn't you agree, Mr. Bryson?

*Bryson*: Well, mysticism has always been something so completely alien to my own temperament and spirit that I find it very difficult to know what mystics are *trying* to talk about. I know what they *say*, but I'm not quite sure what they're trying to talk about. Certainly, on historical basis, what you say is true. There are many men and women who have been mystics, who have been credited with mystical vision, but who have not been ascetic. But it seems to me that doesn't quite dispose of the difficulty with Blake. As Mr. Thompson has said, he didn't seem to want to deny the particulars of experience, although many mystics have tried to do that.

*Fremantle*: Yes, but I think that you can't ever get anywhere by denial. Mystics have, on their way up, sometimes denied certain things in view of getting others. It's as if you have only a certain amount of time, and you choose to go to the A & P rather than to Woolworth's. But no mystic ever got where he was going by denial, and Blake is very strong on that.

*Thompson*: Yes, he was deathly opposed to denial of any of the instincts and energies. He thought that even murder was better than denial of energy.

*Bryson*: Energy, then, is the thing that seems to him to have a kind of naïve and inherent goodness in it?

*Thompson*: Not naïve. It's simply that goodness and evil become meaningless at that point. His idea of good and evil, I think, is rather like that at the end of the Book of Job. The poem about the tiger, for instance, is sometimes said to be about the problem of evil. I take it that it is not about that, but about something beyond the question of good and evil.

*Bryson*: I don't think we can get away from *The Tiger*, because it is the very essence of the Blake people are familiar with. As a matter of fact, people know the poem who don't even know who wrote it.

*Thompson*: They always have. People in Blake's own day knew *The Tiger* without knowing who wrote it. Lamb knew the poem, but didn't know anything at all about Blake. No one ever forgets it:

*Tiger! Tiger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?  
  
In what distant deeps or skies  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand dare seize the fire?  
  
And what shoulder, and what art  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? and what dread feet?*

*What the hammer? What the chain?  
 In what furnace was thy brain?  
 What the anvil? what dread grasp  
 Dare its deadly terrors clasp?*

*When the stars threw down their spears,  
 And water'd heaven with their tears,  
 Did he smile his work to see?  
 Did he who made the Lamb make thee?*

*Tiger! Tiger! burning bright  
 In the forests of the night,  
 What immortal hand or eye,  
 Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?*

Now it's my impression that people often interpret this to mean that the tiger is one thing and the lamb another—that the tiger is a very bad thing who would eat the lamb if he could, while the lamb is very nice and only eats lettuce. Is that *your* impression of the poem?

*Bryson*: I'm not sure he doesn't mean that maybe the *lamb* eats the tiger. You do get a kind of shiver down your spine. Bertrand Russell, in a forthcoming book of autobiographical sketches that I happen to have seen, says that somebody stopped him on a stair at Cambridge, when he was a young man and had never heard of Blake nor of this poem, and blurted it out at him, holding him like the Ancient Mariner by the shoulders. And Russell tells how the chills went up the back of his neck and his hair stood on end most of the night as a result. Well, when a poem has that much power, and this one has, does it have to have a meaning beyond its power?

*Fremantle*: Oh, yes!

*Thompson*: The point is the tiger. I think the great virtue of this poem is that it makes us *see* that tiger, not a symbolic tiger but a real tiger. All the metaphors, this beautiful business about the hammer, the chain, and the anvil—all that serves really to remind us, I think, of a tiger, as does a visit to the zoo. Of course, a tiger in a zoo is maybe something less than a real tiger . . .

*Bryson*: Not "burning in the forests of the night."

*Fremantle*: Ah, but the great point of the tiger is that it's referred always to the Creator. The extraordinary thing is that somebody, some person—not a force, not a Newtonian concept, but some person—may eat the tiger and may eat the lamb, and what an extraordinary being it must be who would make both. The astonishment, the awe, is not only at the tiger but at the terrifying Being who made both the tiger and the lamb.

*Thompson*: There I think we come to a fundamental disagreement. I think that even the reference to the person or the force—a person here, obviously, something like a blacksmith, or one of the workers in "the dark Satanic Mills" . . .

*Bryson*: A demiurge?

*Fremantle*: Always a person in Blake, I think.

*Thompson*: It is very much a person. That's why he dwells upon the shoulder, the feet, the hand reaching into the fire. This tiger is still red hot.

*Fremantle:* That's it. I think the clue is Blake's own remark: energy is the only life and it is from the body. To me, he's one of the great prophets because he developed this concept a great deal ahead of his time, ahead of Freud, ahead of all the modern ideas of fields of energy—the idea that life itself had this tremendous energy, that it was part of the person of God Himself.

*Thompson:* And one of the great problems in talking about it is how to do so without bringing in the question of its origin. How is there any adequate way to talk about the world, except in the terms that most people today can no longer literally accept? As I take it, Mrs. Fremantle, you mean that the real reference of the tiger is to the Creator and not to the things created. It seems to me it's like the end of the Book of Job; it's reminiscent of Leviathan, out of whose mouth go burning torches. There, I think, the real reference is to creation, to the thing created; and the magic is in the intense power of a man who really saw what was created, as Blake did.

*Fremantle:* You remember that somebody asked him if, when the sun rises, he did not see a round disc of fire like gold guinea. And he said no, he saw it as an innumerable company of the heavenly host crying "Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty!" That's a little like Van Gogh, when the old man was looking at the painting of the chair. He said "But I never saw a chair like that," and Van Gogh said "Don't you wish you could?" Don't we wish, all of us, that we could see the tiger as Blake saw it?

*Bryson:* But there's a difference between you two about the intensity involved. Mr. Thompson thinks that the reason why this poem is so powerful and so important, if I don't misinterpret him, is the intensity of vision. And to Mrs. Fremantle, it's the intensity of the concept of the Creator. Are they the same?

*Fremantle:* I think the same. I think that what we both feel is the intensity of the experience; and that's the point, I think, where the mystic comes in—that it is a vision and that Blake is a prophet and that he really saw these things. The prophets of whom he grew so fond, Ezekiel and all those people, what did they prophesy? They prophesied the Messiah—and the Messiah was always a human person, the eruption into human form of the Divine. He says in a verse from *The Book of Thel*:

*God appears, and God is Light,  
To those poor souls who dwell in Night;  
But does a Human Form display  
To those who dwell in realms of Day.*

There you have a little progression from the God who is merely Light to the God in human form who is the object of prophecy.

*Thompson:* I'm not sure that I understand what you mean by prophecy. Are you speaking of something that Blake thought would occur in the future?

*Fremantle:* Well, he did do that too. He had a queer kind of second sight, didn't he? When his father wanted to apprentice him to a gentleman who was going to teach him how to engrave, Blake said "I don't like the looks of him; he looks as if he was going to be



hanged." And, sure enough, twelve years later the poor man was hanged. But I mean prophecy in a rather wider sense than that; I mean prophesy in the sense that he foresaw the evil, for instance, that the ideas of Newton and Voltaire and Rousseau would bring; he foresaw that whole horrid century, and he didn't like the revolutions when they came.

*Thompson*: He also saw the evil that the past had nourished, the evil of the social system of England, the evil of the church of his day. This is not prophecy, except as it says again what he actually saw; the "strange landscape" which made people say that Blake was insane was actually the landscape in front of their eyes, only they couldn't see it. They could not see London, for instance, as Blake saw it.

*Bryson*: Of course, it wasn't an accident that Blake called one of his collections of poems *Songs of Innocence*. There's a quality in Blake for which I can find no other name than childlikeness. It doesn't mean naïveté—that's the wrong word for it. It doesn't mean being innocent as a child is innocent, because a child's innocence—as Blake knew and as we all know now because Freud came along and told us so—embraces a good deal of what in anyone else would be evil. This childlikeness is a kind of clarity of sight. But I don't believe that the prophetic quality in him alone would have made him a great poet. The other kind of intensity of vision is there, too. If he had done nothing more with the tiger poem than this extraordinary realization of the very presence of a tiger, he would still have part of what makes a great poet.

*Fremantle*: Just as in *Ah, Sun-Flower!* which has no particular meaning in the *Tiger* sense but is one of the most wonderful ones and one of the most quoted:

*Ah, Sun-flower! weary of time,  
Who countest the steps of the Sun;  
Seeking after that sweet golden clime,  
Where the traveller's journey is done;*

That's just sheer poetry, isn't it?

*Bryson*: It also has other qualities, that are characteristic of him. How would you list his qualities? I don't mean in any tiresome catalogue, but what would you say are his chief qualities as a poet?

*Thompson*: I think one of them is this childlike quality you mentioned, the ability of the child to see with an innocent eye—which means without seeing good or evil, without being blinded by the knowledge of good and evil, without the inability to recognize things because they are unpleasant. There is the remark made by a modern critic that "Blake, like all great poets, is extremely unpleasant." I think one of his distinctive qualities is his exploitation of the simple forms of actual children's poetry. The forms, for instance of the nursery rhyme, and of the hymns of Isaac Watts, which were sung in the churches then and which children were familiar with. Those are the things with which he begins—and then, suddenly, comes this terrible shock of something that the child sees very clearly but which we choose not to see because we can't stand it.

*Fremantle*: One of the things I like best about him as a poet is

to see how funny he is; there are not many very funny poets in the English language.

*Thompson:* That's true.

*Fremantle:* And, for instance, so few people know that this was by Blake—it's a condemnation of a whole type of woman—"Her whole life is an Epigram, smart, smooth and neatly pen'd,/Platted quite neat to catch applause, with a sliding noose at the end."

*Thompson:* He makes the best epigrams in English, surely, and that's part of the condensation which is a gift in the other poems; a simple stanza seems to sum up the whole experience of London in the industrial revolution.

*Bryson:* Yet there's no hardness in his wit. The sharpness does not mean a hard surface.

*Thompson:* I think Mrs. Fremantle is going to object; I'll hear her objection first and then I'll object.

*Fremantle:* I was just going to say that he *could* be very hard.

*Bryson:* I'm talking about the quality of the poetry, not his spirit. His spirit can be savage—I don't mean that; I mean the wit is not hard, it's not the sharp-cut, sharp-edged wit that we generally associate with French poets. It's as brief and as witty in its economy as theirs, but it's luminous rather than hard. It's very difficult to describe.

*Fremantle:* It's not cynical.

*Thompson:* He never became a cynic.

*Bryson:* But you're both talking about a moral quality, and I'm talking about his stylistic quality.

*Fremantle:* But his rage is wonderful:

*A petty sneaking knave I knew—  
O! Mr. Cromek, how do ye do?*

*Thompson:* Yes, it sounds like something someone has said. I think we should say that, probably, about his poetry too: it often sounds like something someone might say. He has that quality of common speech, which had pretty much disappeared from poetry in Blake's day.

*Bryson:* Both of you spoke of the contemporary world in which he lived, London from the time of the American Revolution through the next generation, say. He lived in the very heart of the Romantic revival in English poetry, when all the great Romantics were writing or getting ready to write or just had written. He had no connection with them, had he? He had no connection with anything.

*Thompson:* He had no connection with them. They had, unfortunately, no connection with him. He had anticipated everything that Wordsworth said he was going to do, and had done it far more profoundly, I believe, than Wordsworth did, both in language and in subject. He really knew about children. And there was no connection. No one knew about these things. He had a few friends, of course, but lived in isolation. His poems were never read.

*Bryson:* He was the crazy man Blake, who made a bad living up in a garret, with a patient wife, doing engravings and occasionally showing up with pictures of the soul of the flea.

*Fremantle*: He had the happiest deathbed anyone ever had—that's a nice thing to remember. No one else ever quite so much enjoyed their death.

*Bryson*: When you say "he enjoyed his death," you seem to be saying that the man was glad to get rid of life. He enjoyed life, too.

*Fremantle*: I think he took the view that Socrates took, that death must be a good thing because either it's the end of a good life or it's the beginning of a better one. He enjoyed his death because he'd enjoyed his life so much.

*Bryson*: We've said almost nothing—and can't say anything, I suppose—about those dreadfully long prophetic books he wrote about strange, almost unimaginable characters. Do they constitute any part of the greatness of Blake?

*Thompson*: Not in my mind. I think they're wonderful oratory, but I don't like oratory.

*Fremantle*: They're becoming very much the mode now. For instance, Mr. Joyce Cary used quotations from one of the prophetic books for each chapter in *The Horse's Mouth*, and in Mr. Colin Wilson's new book, *The Outsider*, Blake is studied in terms of the prophetic books rather than the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.

*Thompson*: They are very much studied now, and I have no doubt that they can become scripture. You can prove anything out of Blake. And I think these books will be read—after all, it's only in our own time that they've been published. There hasn't been much time to consider them.

*Bryson*: I suppose any poet ought to be content with a reputation that's based upon a few of his best things, even if people remember what he did—this is certainly true of Blake—and completely forget who it was that did them.



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# THE INVITATION TO LEARNING READER

*From Prison and Exile*

*Edited By*  
RALPH BACKLUND



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FROM PRISON AND EXILE

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# PLATO

## *Crito*

(As broadcast October 7, 1956)

CHARLES FRANKEL • ROBERT M. MACIVER • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* When one studies the *Crito*, which was not written in prison but is about a conversation that took place in prison, he realizes that some of the most interesting, profound, moving, and important conversations and thoughts that man has ever had have taken place in prison. And even if this isn't an exact historical account of what Socrates and his companions actually talked about, it *could* have been.

*MacIver:* Yes, it carries a remarkable ring of conviction; it is true to the picture of Socrates that we have drawn from all the sources.

*Frankel:* When you reflect that the *Crito* tells us the story of a man who's about to be executed, one of the most interesting things about it is the complete calm with which Socrates accepts the whole situation. He is the calmest person in the entire story.

*Bryson:* Calm, but not in the least a self-conscious hero. How did he manage to be so calm, to be so perfectly willing to know that he was going to die in—well, he thinks in two days, his friends think in twenty-four hours; how did he succeed in being calm without being self-consciously heroic?

*Frankel:* Because, I think, he was utterly self-conscious about his reasons. He was a philosopher. Unlike the conventional hero who does extreme things for reasons of which he is not quite aware, things which surpass his understanding, Socrates is completely articulate, completely explicit about why he has done what he has done and why he's going to do the things he intends to do.

*MacIver:* But being a philosopher is not quite enough to explain why he was so perfectly calm, Mr. Frankel. You, being a philosopher, will probably agree with me. Socrates was a very remarkable person in his own right, apart from his philosophy, and it was a really noble example that he gave us.

*Frankel:* Obviously, not all philosophers are capable of this.

*MacIver:* Very few are.

*Bryson:* Very few human beings of any kind, of course. But here's a man who was about to die for a conviction, and the whole plot of the *Crito*, insofar as it has a plot, is that he didn't have to die if he didn't want to—which is a curious situation. This is a man who is not a self-conscious hero in any sense; he's dying for a conviction—and he didn't have to die.

*Frankel:* Yes, he has a chance to get away.

*Bryson:* And that's the whole story.

*MacIver:* Let's get at the setting of this thing. Here's Socrates.

He's been condemned to die on what he regards as purely false charges. He has been kept in jail, but as soon as a certain secret ship reaches Athens he's going to be put to death. That ship has been sighted, coming around a near cape. Socrates has one day left to live. He has dreamed that he has one day, and it proves to be so. And at that moment, in that last day, his friends come to the prison and offer him the means of escape. That's where we begin.

*Bryson:* Not, in modern terms, the most honorable means of escape, but in the terms of that time—roughly two and a half millennia ago—not such bad terms.

*Frankel:* Not bad terms. It was an age of political upheavals. A good deal of corruption and graft was in the air. His friend Crito, who was a wealthy man, comes to tell him that he has, as we now say, fixed the jailers; he's bribed them. If Socrates chooses to escape, he doesn't have to do anything more than walk out the door. Nothing more will be said about it.

*Bryson:* Ah, but there's the rub, Mr. Frankel: he has to get out of Athens.

*Frankel:* Yes, that's a real rub. Apparently the only place he can go is Thessaly—and Socrates thinks Thessaly is no place for anybody.

*MacIver:* But do you think that he would have gone anywhere, in view of the argument he uses later?

*Bryson:* I don't suppose that he would have—because, by his own explicit statement, he would have gone out with the intention of repeating exactly the conduct that got him into jail in the first place. There wouldn't have been much use in going out.

*MacIver:* And he wouldn't have gone out anyway because of his strong argument that the law must be obeyed.

*Bryson:* I'd like to ask a question of you as a professional student of philosophy, Mr. Frankel: how much of his complete self-control, his dismissal of his wife and children because they might cry—how much of that is Greek and how much of it is Plato's attempt to show you what an extraordinary person Socrates was?

*Frankel:* I think there's a good deal of controversy over that. Obviously, Socrates behaves in accordance with certain pretty well established Greek mores.

*Bryson:* But the Greeks were not a calm people.

*Frankel:* The ability of a man to live up to the mores of his society is a tough test. Plato wants to say that Socrates passed this extreme test with flying colors. What interests me in this initial situation is that Crito, his friend, knows he's got a tough customer to deal with, because he doesn't go to Socrates and say, "Now look here: we've bribed the jailers, you can save yourself." On the contrary, he talks to Socrates in terms of his duties to others rather than to himself. Crito says, "You should try to escape because, in the first place, it looks bad for your friends if they don't do anything. People are going to say they don't really like you; they had money but wouldn't spend it to save you. Why don't you, as it were, do us a favor? Also, you've got children and a wife—you've got to take care of them. You can't leave them widows and orphans in this world." He doesn't really say to Socrates: "Save your own skin."



*Bryson*: Crito knows that would have been useless. But neither does he appeal to any desire that Socrates might have had to pay off the people who pulled this dirty trick on him and put him in pain of death.

*MacIver*: On the contrary, he shows nowhere any animus of any kind against the accusers who falsely accused him and the judges who he thinks falsely condemned him. He took a much broader line, and that's what gives us a really good argument here. He says: the law, all laws, the laws of the city or the state in which I live are laws that bind me because I've lived under them all my life and I've followed them, I've never said anything against them; now, in my old age, how am I going to be a traitor to them?

*Frankel*: Yes, and he arrives at that general principle in an order that's the reverse of the usual dramatic order. Instead of beginning by stating some good, simple, concrete reason for not fleeing, he starts with an abstraction and gets to the concrete things later on.

*Bryson*: But with typical Platonic poetic skill he personifies the abstraction.

*Frankel*: Oh, yes. This becomes as moving as any personal considerations would have been. I think human beings have learned that abstraction is frequently moving.

*MacIver*: To personify a thing was much easier, I think, for the Greeks than it would be for us. They had many gods. To Socrates, the laws all together form one great goddess or god. He says, in effect, "This great power, this dream that's set our lives, under which we live, this dream says to me: are you going to betray me, after all I've done for you through your whole long life? Are you now at the age of seventy going to say no more?"

*Frankel*: I don't know who it was who remarked that there were three kinds of logic in Plato: inductive, deductive, and seductive.

*MacIver*: That's good!

*Frankel*: The quote isn't mine alas. But in any event, Socrates in personifying the argument obviously isn't the cool rationalist that he's presented as being. A good deal of it lies in the poetry of the argument. The argument itself, though, is rather interesting when Crito says to him, "Now look here, what will people say if you don't escape?" Socrates replies, "Should one guide one's life by the views of the many, or by the views of the wise few who know?" The answer to that is pretty plain: you should guide your life by the views of the few who know.

*Bryson*: Socrates and Crito had discussed this many times before, and Crito can't answer it now because he has agreed with him on previous occasions.

*MacIver*: I accept your statement, Mr. Frankel, but it leaves out something, does it not? After all, he was condemned by a particular jury, and had been accused by two people whose reputation was not too high in the city of Athens. And to say that these are the same as the laws, and the whole society in which he lived, is just an exaggeration. At any rate, it raises an interesting question.

*Frankel*: Oh, it certainly does. There's quite a difference. Of course, that's frequent in Plato—the contrast between the idealization

of the thing and the actual, concrete detail—though it doesn't come out too clearly here.

*Bryson*: I'd like to take a closer look at the argument that these laws really put up to Socrates. They say: "Through what we provide, you got born, actually; the marriage of your parents was something we arranged, and you've lived and been educated by us; and now, after you have lived here, by consent, for seventy years—you could have gone somewhere else, but you didn't—now you're going to destroy us by refusing to accept a decision." This says that one must accept the decision of the laws to which he's loyal, even though he die for it.

*Frankel*: There are two elements in the basic argument. What would a wise man do? Well, says Socrates, he would recognize in the first place that the laws were the very basis of everything on which he'd been nourished. Now, as I've learned from reading Mr. MacIver's books over the years, there's a fundamental difficulty here. There are dangerous consequences in doing what's very characteristic in reading Plato: namely, confusing society as a whole with the state and some specific set of legal provisions. There's a second element, though, in Socrates's argument which, at any rate for me, is rather convincing. Socrates points out that free exit from Athens had always been available to him. In choosing to remain in Athens, he freely committed himself to living in accordance with Athenian laws. He could argue against them, he could fight them, but when these laws in an established legal way declare him guilty, he must accept that provision on the basis of his tacit contract with them.

*MacIver*: You know, when we discuss this very remarkable dialogue I'm torn between two things. One is my sense of admiration for the skill of the pleas, the heroism of Socrates and the way he puts his case. But, on the other hand, there's what I'm afraid I must think of as a weakness in some of these arguments. In the first place, he says the laws, all the laws, are one; these laws include all the things that have been done for me, for my education, for my nurture—the way in which my parents were married under the state, all the things that give me the kind of society in which I want to live; all these things, he says, have been done for me, and if I leave I am betraying all of them. He would be, certainly, violating a law of the city. But to say that he's violating all the customs and usages, all the ways of life that have developed in the city of Athens, and saying that they're all bound up with this law that has condemned him, seems to me to be going too far.

*Frankel*: Yes, I thoroughly agree.

*Bryson*: But is your criticism of it on historical grounds or on logical grounds? The Greeks were much more likely to make this false amalgam of everything and call it by one name than we are, but they did make it, didn't they?

*MacIver*: Yes, but I'd rather keep all my criticism to logical grounds, if I'm not in error.

*Bryson*: But you're not saying that Plato was misrepresenting the Greek attitude?

*MacIver*: No, I'm saying the attitude was wrong. It's very diffi-

cult to deal with in modern terms because we don't think the state is all-inclusive, except in totalitarian states.

*Bryson*: An idea we reject.

*MacIver*: And if we reject that idea, we must, I think, modify or even reject Socrates's argument that all these things together are the things that he would be betraying.

*Bryson*: And that leads us right straight to the next question: should one always obey the laws of one's country even when one believes honestly that they're wrong?

*MacIver*: Well, not to obey a law because you don't approve of it seems to me to be an impossible position. But there are extreme cases, and history is full of them. The record not only of martyrs but of the great heroes of our civilization is often bound up, at some juncture, with some kind of disobedience. And I would not like to dismiss off-hand as wrong—ethically wrong, morally wrong—any possible disobedience of the law if one knows that it violates the conscience of the individual. It may be his religion, and I think there was something of that element in Socrates's attitude. There have been some famous Greek plays on that, such as the *Antigone* where the heroine takes it as her duty to obey her conscience and the tribal rules against the king. You see, she's making a distinction that Plato would not make because his philosophy didn't see it in those terms. But it's a very important distinction. On the one hand you have the community, the state, the laws; on the other are all the customs or usages or ways of life. Now it's a question of where the greatest loyalty, the greatest value, lies. That question can only arise in what I call extreme cases. Take the case of people who fled from Hitler's government when they were condemned. They'd lived all their lives in Germany; before that final rupture they'd accepted all of it. Well, I'm not going to condemn these people simply because they broke a law.

*Frankel*: Oh, I wouldn't think of it, but I think there are, at least implicitly, provisions in the argument that take account of a good deal of what you say. You see, the question isn't raised whether a man is right to disobey a law when he disagrees with it, because Socrates does *not* disagree with the law under which he is condemned.

*MacIver*: Excuse me: Socrates doesn't disagree with the law, but what happened? Look at the case. Socrates was condemned on two grounds: one was that he had introduced new gods, which may have been used to make prejudice with the crowd; the other was that he was corrupting the youth, which might mean anything. And he thought he was falsely condemned.

*Frankel*: I wish to make that point precisely. Socrates thinks that if you do corrupt the youth, you should in some way or other be punished. He merely feels that *he* hasn't done it. The point is, he agrees with the law. He also agrees with the general judicial process under which he's condemned. He merely thinks a grave error has been made by certain human beings in his case. Now that is the first element. The second thing is that he has, by remaining in Athens, committed himself to accept these general laws and these general judicial provisions. Now, this is, I think, a fundamental thing—because the man who leaves Germany, to take your case, is fleeing from laws with

which he disagrees; he disagrees with the law itself and he also thinks that the judicial enactments under which he is found guilty are themselves wrong.

*MacIver*: Well, you've made two points there. In the first place, Socrates stayed in Athens all his life and therefore he's committed himself, he's under a kind of contract. That's one. The other is that he has no objection to the law itself, but only to the fact there was a miscarriage of justice in this case.

*Frankel*: That's right.

*MacIver*: The first argument I would not make so fundamental as you do, Mr. Frankel, because I think the fact that a man has lived all his life under laws with which he was in general sympathy has nothing to do with the fact that there may be a very grave miscarriage of justice or a very grave change in the government itself.

*Frankel*: But that, of course, is not part of the hypothesis.

*MacIver*: No, this is miscarriage, not a change in the government.

*Frankel*: If there's a change in the government you're right, but that isn't the story here.

*MacIver*: If there was a change in the government, that would negate the charge that because he's lived under these laws hitherto, he must—on that ground, mind you—obey them.

*Frankel*: You're quite right, sir.

*MacIver*: So the question remains: when a man is falsely condemned—as Socrates believes and as a good many people in Athens did believe—what should he do? Is it still his duty under all conditions to obey and to accept? Now, what makes it difficult to criticize Socrates's position is more the heroism of it—the calmness and reason of his arguments—than it is any ultimate validity in what he says on behalf of it.

*Bryson*: What about the argument I've heard that Socrates, even though he said he would only follow the advice of the wise few, actually is obeying the many? Because it amounts to that—he's obeying the mob that had condemned him to death.

*Frankel*: And those of his friends, those whom he thought were wiser than the mob, are advising him to fly.

*Bryson*: But he is now saying, in effect, I'm going to follow what the mob says.

*Frankel*: I'll follow what the *law* says, even if the mob happens to be on its side.

*MacIver*: Well, that's the point, isn't it? The mob just happens to be on the same side; what he's doing is following the law.

*Frankel*: There are rights of conscience which this dialogue, the *Crito*, never explicitly brings out into the open.

*MacIver*: That's quite right. On the whole, it's a modern position. Of course, one must remember that it happened in many past civilizations and it even happened in Greece. At the very time that Socrates was in prison, a play of Euripides appeared in which the dramatist took the opposite side to that which the philosopher is now taking. In the case of the play, Antigone is obeying not the rule of the king, but the rule of her conscience, the rule of the tribe, and the rule of her God.

*Frankel*: And, of course, it's actually Socrates's conscience, though it's not explicit in the dialogue, that moves you. Because he asks in the end, arguing not so abstractly: "Why should I, an old man, go to these extremes to keep myself going in a rather miserable country for another two or three years? It's not life that counts, but the good life." What impresses us is that Socrates lays down conditions under which he is willing to go on living.

*Bryson*: I think Socrates is actually defying the state. He's saying "Well, I will accept death, if I'm condemned to it, but I will not live the kind of life the state says I must. If I live, I will continue to teach as I always have. If I can't teach, I prefer to die." That, in a sense, is a defiance not of the laws as they are personified but of the state.

*Frankel*: It's a kind of ultimate victory which I suppose many martyrs feel. That is to say, in dying they make it plain that there are conditions under which they are willing to live but that no one can force them to live outside these conditions.

*MacIver*: Yes, but there's also a paradox in view of the other positions taken by Plato. It's a most interesting situation. On the one hand, Socrates says "If I stay in Athens, I will follow the course I've been following before; even though it's been condemned by the law, I will follow that course." And then he goes on to say, "I must stay in prison—I must drink the hemlock because I have been condemned by the laws, and I must obey the law." Of course it's a paradox, but it seems to me one of the very few real solutions for this situation that anyone's ever offered.

*Frankel*: Provided that you add to it, Mr. MacIver, the thing we haven't mentioned, and that is a thing which is always basic in any position that Socrates assumes, here and in other dialogues: the evil man cannot hurt me because he cannot touch my virtue, which is all that matters.

*MacIver*: But *we* cannot assume that, for reasons which modern conditions in certain totalitarian countries make plain.

*Bryson*: Well, he believed it, didn't he? Socrates said the good man cannot be touched by misfortune.

*MacIver*: Socrates actually did say that, yes.

*Bryson*: In the *Phaedo*, and in some of the other dialogues Plato wrote, Socrates asks, "Who knows, after all, that death is an evil?"

*MacIver*: But that, again, is curiously mixed. One of the arguments Socrates uses in the *Crito* is: I'm an old man, I'm seventy years of age, I've only a very few years left to live; why should I, at this stage in my life, value these few years so much when it would mean disobeying the law?

*Bryson*: Didn't it ever occur to you that we make a mistake in thinking of Socrates as a martyr? It seems to me that he had one of the most fortunate lives that any man ever had.

*MacIver*: I still think that any man who willingly stays in jail and drinks the hemlock, willingly does so when he has the means of escape, has some of the qualities of a martyr and certainly the qualities of a hero.

*Bryson*: Oh, so do I! I'm merely saying the man had a very fortunate life.

*Frankel*: And death, you see, doesn't mean to him what it means to people who have never committed themselves to impersonal things beyond their lives.

*Bryson*: Precisely.

*Frankel*: What counts for Socrates is certain ideals which will live beyond him. For him to die is a kind of accidental feature of the ongoing life of these greater things, and so martyrdom doesn't have quite the same sting. He dies quite happily, quite willingly.

*MacIver*: Well, maybe. I don't necessarily take every word that Plato wrote as really being an accurate statement of what a man under those conditions would say.

*Frankel*: Neither do I.

*Bryson*: Well, do you take every word that Socrates speaks as meaning what it seems to say?

*MacIver*: On the contrary, I think some of it will be interpreted in different ways. But this last argument that "I've only a very few years to live; if I go away I'll live unhappily, because I can never be in the life and the culture of society which is mine, and therefore why should I at this cost?"—now that's an argument I can understand.

*Bryson*: You accept his personal argument but you reject his theoretical argument?

*MacIver*: Ah, you've stuck me there, and I'm afraid I'll have to agree with you!

*Frankel*: I think that frequently there's a psychological persuasiveness about a Platonic dialogue which is much greater than the actual logical cohesion with which it all hangs together. In this dialogue, you can't help but be moved and persuaded.

*Bryson*: You know, I sometimes really wonder why Crito and the other friends who come to rescue him are, in spite of the great reputation of Socrates, so ready to accept his argument and let him die?

*Frankel*: Well, they know they have no alternative. They can't help themselves, they know they can't do anything without his active consent. They also knew that he was a stubborn old man.

*Bryson*: Of course, I also wonder how many years any one of us would give off the end of his life to have one of the greatest writers in the whole history of the world as our biographer, and to represent for the rest of time the ideal of heroism on behalf of freedom of the mind—as Socrates does in the dialogues of Plato.

# JOHN BUNYAN

## *Pilgrim's Progress*

(As broadcast October 14, 1956)

GORDON S. HAIGHT • WILLIAM Y. TINDALL • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* John Bunyan is one man who really was in jail when he wrote his masterpiece. As a matter of fact, one might say that if he hadn't been in jail he would never have had a literary career.

*Haight:* When you think of all the fine books that were written in jail, it makes you sometimes envy the people who get the leisure to write them there.

*Bryson:* You don't think that university halls are kind of a substitute for prison?

*Haight:* Our students may think so, but I'm afraid jail is a better place for writing books.

*Bryson:* But Bunyan was in jail for what we, I should think, might call a very honorable reason.

*Tindall:* Yes, he was considered by the government, a very conservative government, to be a dangerous radical and they put him in jail to avoid trouble. The equivalent of the FBI got after him. Bunyan was a dissenting preacher, an unlicensed preacher, and the English government under Charles II associated that kind of preaching with rebellious tendencies.

*Bryson:* Isn't it rather paradoxical that after having gone through a few years of Puritanism, the English went back to the Stuarts under the "Merry Monarch" and immediately began to clamp down on piety?

*Tindall:* The immediate cause was the so-called Fifth Monarchy rebellion in 1660. Baptists and other dissenting people had come out in open rebellion in London, and Bunyan was jailed as a result of that.

*Bryson:* So it wasn't so unreasonable to put him in prison?

*Tindall:* By their lights, very reasonable.

*Bryson:* But he went ahead and wrote his book—and didn't he accomplish with *Pilgrim's Progress* the very thing they were trying to keep him from doing?

*Haight:* Well, I think he had a good deal of leniency in his prison. He could not only write, have pen and paper with him, but could go off on little trips. He went home to visit his family from time to time. I think he supported them, actually, by making some sort of laces that he sold at the door of the prison. He wasn't quite in solitary confinement as we would think of it.

*Bryson:* He couldn't preach.

*Haight:* At one point I believe they forbade him to appear at the door of the jail, because he was gathering crowds outside and preaching to them from inside the prison.

*Bryson:* Well, is it simplifying the thing too much to say that

having stopped his mouth, they couldn't stop his pen? And that he wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* as a kind of sermon in print which would accomplish what he wanted?

*Tindall*: Yes, but why did he write it in this particular form? He had been writing sermons for about twenty years before he wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*. These were all printed, and then, while in jail, in the midst of writing similar sermons, he suddenly writes what he calls an allegory. Why did he choose this particular form, the metaphor of a man's journey through difficult country, instead of preaching an abstract sermon as he had done before?

*Bryson*: For safety, perhaps?

*Tindall*: It might be for safety—that is, the government would probably look more leniently on something in fictional guise. But there was another reason that he speaks about in his preface. He says that sermons are often ineffectual, they reach only certain intelligent people. He wants to reach those whom a sermon will miss, and he feels he can do it by giving the same material a vivid fictional surface.

*Haight*: Yes, I think that's the reason. He was bringing it to a level where his audience would grasp it easily, and hiding his sermon underneath the story.

*Bryson*: The old device of honey on the cup.

*Tindall*: He's very conscious of his technique. He talks about his method. He says "I'm using similitudes, I'm using metaphors," and then he warns you at the end: "Do not play with the outside of my dream." That means that his dream is not to be taken as a work of fiction—it all has a meaning.

*Bryson*: Before I come back to that, why did Pilgrim take a journey? It's a pretty dreadful one. I mean that poor Pilgrim gets into mudholes, meets dangerous beasts and fabulous monsters and queer characters, and gets into all kinds of trouble. Was this a popular form at that time?

*Tindall*: Yes it was. This journey was used by Puritan preachers as a metaphor in their sermons. It had been used for many years to represent the dissenter's life. Dissenting people used it more often than the orthodox Protestants, but all of them used it. So what Bunyan did was to take a metaphor from the ordinary sermon and blow it up, as it were, into a whole book.

*Haight*: I think he was taking a metaphor that was probably more familiar to them than it is to us. We have to remember that there were no paved roads of any kind in those days; anyone who went for a walk had to contend with mudholes and narrow paths and darkness (there were no street lights of any kind), with personal assaults and vicious dogs, with documents being asked for, with passports and visas and papers—

*Bryson*: To say nothing of highwaymen.

*Haight*: Yes, highwaymen. I think they were probably even worse than the muggers are in New York today.

*Tindall*: That's why this particular metaphor was a very suitable one for Bunyan's purpose. His object, as he says in the preface, was to show the holy man's life. And of course that life had its difficulties, its trials, its errors. There were crossroads, there were Sloughs of



Despond, periods of depression, and so on—so that this was a quite natural vehicle for doing what he wanted to do.

*Bryson*: I suppose the middle of the sixteenth century—I owe to your erudition, Mr. Haight, the knowledge that this is the three hundredth anniversary of Bunyan's *first* book—the middle of the sixteenth century was a time when there was more modern spirit in the world than there were modern devices. We can be psychologically at home with Bunyan, but we can't imagine the life of the ordinary man.

*Haight*: Christian is an ordinary man in most ways, though he has perhaps more spirit, more pertinacity, than most of us would have.

*Tindall*: He makes a great many very human errors—that is, the man isn't merely a label, as one would suppose. He is a human being and fairly created. Maybe he isn't as complex as a character by Dostoevsky, but we'd be very much mistaken if we put him down as an empty cipher with a label on him.

*Bryson*: That's true of Pilgrim, Mr. Tindall, but what about all these people that he meets who have metaphorical names? Is that in the tradition of the time?

*Tindall*: I think it is, and these people are very vividly and economically created. Some of them—oh, Formalist, Hypocrisy, Ignorance—we would tend to dismiss. But if you look at their conversation, Bunyan gives them little touches that make them come out vividly. For example, Ignorance is described as a brisk lad coming down a little crooked lane, and that in itself somehow makes the man stand out and live.

*Bryson*: Do you mean that all of these figures named for qualities really are characters in the modern sense?

*Tindall*: Well, they're not as highly elaborated as the characters in a modern novel, but they are as elaborate as some characters in plays I can think of. It's a very dramatic sort of technique that Bunyan is using here.

*Haight*: Some of it is in the literary tradition, too: the scenes in the Interpreter's house, for example, where the Interpreter takes Christian into the room and shows him various scenes—a man in a cage, and so on.

*Bryson*: What do you mean, "shows him"? Does he show him a picture of it? Or give him a vision?

*Haight*: It's just an exhibit. It's like Mme. Tussaud's waxworks. He takes him from room to room and shows him these various scenes. In one there's a man representing Despair, who's in a cage. In another, you've got someone sweeping out a heart full of dust and dirt, and the Interpreter explains that the heart is being swept by the Gospel. The thing is interpreted very much in the emblem tradition, I think.

*Bryson*: The emblem tradition: is that still alive?

*Haight*: I suppose the emblem is, in a way, the ancestor of the modern comic strip. It's a picture with a lesson attached to it.

*Bryson*: Are you saying that *Pilgrim's Progress* is a book derived out of the very common little emblem books that were sold and looked at in those days?

*Haight*: No, but I think there's a very close connection. The

emblem books were at their great height about the time of Bunyan's childhood. They came mostly from the Continent—Antwerp was a great center of them—where the Jesuits were using them to interest people and then teach them a lesson unawares, just the way we used comic strips to indoctrinate soldiers during the war.

*Bryson:* Just as they're using comic strips nowadays to educate children. I mean that there are serious uses of the comic strip. But what Mr. Bunyan himself says about *Pilgrim's Progress* is that it is an allegory.

*Tindall:* Yes, I think the allegorical tradition is much older than the emblem tradition, although the latter is certainly a part of it. In an allegory you get moving emblems—that is, you get a narrative which can be taken at its face value, but which has a fixed meaning in the eyes of the author and, usually, the audience. Now Bunyan is very careful to explain the meaning of the actions in his book. That is quite usual in the allegorical tradition. But there is one thing that saves this book from being cut and dried. Usually an allegorical work, as T. S. Eliot says, is vivid in itself, and I think it can be open to other interpretations. Now this journey, which Bunyan says is the journey of the holy man to the city of salvation—

*Bryson:* The man who *wants* to be holy.

*Tindall:* Yes, he's a *professor* in Bunyan's sense. A professor was not an egghead in those days, he was one who professed a dissenting religion. Bunyan says it is the life of such a man, but you know there's more than one meaning to his journey. I've often thought that the topographical ups and downs of the journey might represent a kind of graph of spiritual experience, the experience that Bunyan himself describes in *Grace Abounding*. It can be taken that way. These are the ups and downs in the process of conversion. It could also be taken as the life of the typical unordained preacher of that time, and that might explain the abundance of sermons and debates in this work.

*Haight:* I think it is a novel about people.

*Bryson:* You dare to call it a novel, Mr. Haight?

*Haight:* Well, I suppose we oughtn't to debate about what—

*Bryson:* No, no, I don't mean that, but do you think it stands up as a novel?

*Haight:* This is a rudimentary story that "novel" is as good a word for as anything else. It was certainly read by most people in its day as a story.

*Tindall:* For fun.

*Bryson:* Bunyan says you must be careful not to read it for fun, though.

*Tindall:* Well, he's a professional preacher and he wouldn't want to think that he was just giving you fun. But I'm sure that's what keeps it alive as a novel.

*Bryson:* Wouldn't you say, rather, don't read it *only* for fun?

*Tindall:* Of course, the fun is the way he approaches his readers, but you must go beneath the fun and see the serious intention.

*Haight:* He has a little emblematic, allegorical remark about that: he refers to the text as a hard nut to crack. And he says the shell is on the outside—that's the story. The meat is inside—the meat is the

important thing. I think lots of children have enjoyed the shell more than the meat.

*Bryson*: May I suggest without irreverence to John Bunyan that it's a peanut? It has two nuts in the same shell. At least two. Not only are there all these spiritual meanings, but what about its social and political implications for that time?

*Tindall*: One would expect something of that sort, because Bunyan was a radical from the class we would call the proletariat today.

*Bryson*: Radical not only in religion?

*Tindall*: Radical in society and politics as well. One can see that abundantly demonstrated in his earlier sermons. Now I think this allegory may almost be read in places as a kind of social protest against the entrenched and powerful rulers of the country. For example, when Shame encounters Faithful in the Valley of Humiliation, Shame points out that most professors, most believers, are of base and low degree, while all the gentry and nobility of the country are mostly ungodly.

*Haight*: I suppose Vanity Fair is the episode that gives you the best picture of that. Certainly all the bourgeois, the prosperous people of the town who make up the jury that tries Faithful, are rather unfavorably portrayed. And yet, looking at the end of the episode, I shouldn't think that the social system has been overthrown at all.

*Bryson*: Perhaps that's the pessimistic element of it.

*Haight*: It seems to me that it doesn't really concern him very much. Bunyan's Pilgrim has his eye on other things. He's not interested in wiping out Vanity Fair: it will always be there.

*Tindall*: He doesn't wipe it out, but he describes the thing in terms which we must associate with Restoration society. And notice what his Pilgrims do: they refuse to buy anything at the fair because of a disturbance of the peace, unlicensed preaching. They condemn the rulers of the fair as the devil's partisans. In a way, it's a picture of Bunyan's situation in Restoration society—though he gets away from that by the help of God.

*Haight*: Faithful doesn't, though.

*Tindall*: No. Faithful is martyred.

*Bryson*: But Mr. Haight seems to want to minimize the social and economic implications of this book, as subordinate to its powers as a religious tract and perhaps as mere literature. Would you insist that the people of the time saw in it more social significance than we would?

*Tindall*: I think they did. The people who first read Bunyan's book were mostly dissenters and, of course, they took this primarily as a theological and moral work. In fact, that's what the book is. But I'm sure they were quite aware of the social and political implications of Vanity Fair and of Shame. Did you notice that most of the villains in this book, like Mr. Worldly Wise Man, are called "gentlemen"? That had a highly technical meaning in those days.

*Haight*: I think the worst of them are even higher than gentlemen. They're noblemen. You have Lord Carnal Delight, Lord Luxurious, Lord Lechery, Sir Having Greedy—

*Bryson*: Right out of Restoration drama.

*Haight*: Yes. The higher they go in society, the worse their qualities, as a rule.

*Bryson*: And wouldn't that be fairly accurate as a description of the reign of Charles II? Bunyan wasn't dipping entirely into his imagination, was he?

*Tindall*: No. About the subsequent reception of the book: it seems to me that later on all of this social burden was lost sight of, and the book for two hundred years was taken as a kind of Sunday-school tract and given to children. It was harmless reading for Sunday afternoons; fathers and mothers saw nothing but the moral virtues of this book.

*Bryson*: I think we tend to forget the long period during which we didn't give exciting stories to children unless they were very obviously moral. And I should think part of the popularity of *Pilgrim's Progress* through generation after generation was because there is a pretty good adventure story which is nevertheless inescapably moral. Fathers and mothers didn't worry about the little boy curled up over this book, as they might if it had been, well, the *Morte d'Arthur* or something in which there was real excitement.

*Tindall*: This is one of the few books that they could read on a Sunday afternoon with the family's consent. It was given to everybody, strangely enough—even Anglicans, who get rather a raw deal in this book. Lewis Carroll was brought up on it; it was one of the six books that Abraham Lincoln had when he was a child; even Theodore Roosevelt knew it almost by heart. And I'm sure this comes right out of the general moral and theological safeness of the book.

*Bryson*: And, of course, if it was so common that Lincoln would have it among six books in a frontier settlement, it must have been circulated almost as widely as the Bible.

*Haight*: It would be interesting to speculate how much of Lincoln's fine simple style came out of the reading of books like this. There's somewhat the same quality of simplicity and short, effective speech in both Bunyan's style and Lincoln's.

*Bryson*: But what about this style? Is it the kind of style that keeps a book alive even when its subject matter has gone dry?

*Haight*: I think it does. I read the book first as a child——

*Bryson*: You mean you were trusted with it?

*Haight*: I was trusted with it. I've never forgotten one phrase. I came on it with a start of pleasure when I was rereading it the other day. It's the scene in the House Beautiful where Discretion is talking to Christian, and Bunyan writes: "She smiled, but the water stood in her eyes." I don't know why the phrase stuck with me. I asked myself why did he use the word water? Why didn't he say she had tears in her eyes?—that would be the natural way to say it.

*Tindall*: Bunyan's prose style develops from the common speech around him, and that is a great virtue. The language at its best gets its rhythms and its diction from common speech. But, of course, it gets a lot of its imagery from the King James version of the Bible. And so does Lincoln's. I should say Lincoln and Bunyan are connected in that way: they both derive from the tradition of common speech and from the Bible.

*Bryson*: Certainly this is in the tradition of the great simple style of English, isn't it? And one of the very first. But did it begin the novel, too?

*Haight*: People have argued that. The novel goes way back. Some people say it began with *Genesis*.

*Tindall*: Well, what are we to make of this book today? Nobody would read it instead of a novel. Children are no longer given the book, but when I read it again the other day, I was fascinated. I liked it, and I was wondering about the basis of this appeal. I'm not particularly interested in theological controversy and yet I found the thing fascinating.

*Bryson*: Perhaps you are interested in seventeenth century English literature, Mr. Tindall.

*Tindall*: Well, I was at one time, before I strayed to James Joyce. But this is fascinating, I think, apart from any historical interest. Maybe Bunyan owes his appeal today, such as it is, to the fact that he was using what Jung would call an archetypal pattern. That is this pattern of the journey, which somehow corresponds to something in our minds and seems to tell us a great deal beyond our conscious awareness. If you'll look back over literature, you'll see how much of it is journey literature or quest literature—Homer's *Odyssey*, *Moby Dick*—and the very fact that *Pilgrim's Progress* uses this pattern may appeal to us today.

*Haight*: I suppose James Joyce's *Ulysses* might be included there as a journey about Dublin—

*Tindall*: It's a journey.

*Haight*: Same kind of thing. There is a perennial appeal about it. But the interest of many readers must be in how it comes out.

*Bryson*: Now that's what I meant when I asked you whether you really would call it a novel. Would anybody today who had never heard of John Bunyan, and who had no idea that *Pilgrim's Progress* was for at least two hundred and fifty years one of the three or four most read books of the world, read it for the story?

*Haight*: Well, possibly our declining interest in it is explained by a feeling that the goal is not so exciting as it might be. The City of Zion, when he's arrived there, is rather a dull kind of place with trumpets blowing and all the rest, but not much of interest.

*Tindall*: It's a poor man's heaven, you'll notice, with pearls, harps, crowns, gold, and so on. It's like a Horatio Alger novel, in a way: from rags to riches.

*Bryson*: Today a novelist who describes sin makes it much more interesting than John Bunyan did.

*Haight*: Well, the sinful parts are the most interesting in the book.

*Bryson*: It's rather pallid, though, compared with modern novels.

*Haight*: I think Giant Despair in bed with his wife Mrs. Diffidence is a very interesting little episode—far more so than some of the "good" episodes in the Interpreter's house or the House Beautiful.

*Tindall*: I agree that those who have unfortunate labels like Ignorance and Viands are much more fascinating than the people who have good labels like Faithful and Mr. Standfast. I wonder why John

Bunyan was so much interested in Mr. Standfast that he took his name as the title of a book? He seems to be a pallid and colorless character.

*Haight*: Bunyan, like Shakespeare, is full of "quotations." How many of them have passed into our common talk!

*Tindall*: And look at the titles: *Vanity Fair*, Joyce Cary's *To Be a Pilgrim*—ah, there are a great many of them.

*Haight*: The Valley of the Shadow—well, that's from the Bible.

*Bryson*: Well, if you can say that it has become a kind of source book for literature, can you also say that it's become a source book for social comment?

*Tindall*: Well, no, I wouldn't go so far as to say that. I think the book today retains a kind of shape, a significant shape, which gives us a vision of every man's experience. That is, we all start out with burdens, we are all overcome by anxiety, and with God's help, maybe we can succeed too.

*Haight*: I think perhaps Mr. Tindall has suggested the social problem by pointing out that the goal is really not a poor man's goal, but a rich man's goal. There is not so much social protest as a desire to be like the man who is living more comfortably.

*Tindall*: If you take this allegorically, of course, you don't have to take the riches as your particular heaven.

*Bryson*: No, you don't have to take *riches* as heaven—but you have to have heaven somewhere. And I suspect that one reason why the book is not so dominant in our reading as it once was is because we've become too "sophisticated" for these simple, great presentations of moral problems.

## BOËTHIUS

### The Consolation of Philosophy

(As broadcast October 21, 1956)

PALMER BOVIE

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EDMUND T. SILK

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: Boëthius, unlike some people who have written books in jail, really was confronted with the collapse of his career. He was accused of being a traitor and was facing execution. But *The Consolation of Philosophy* was not an attempt to explain to the world why he was a better man than his fate seemed to indicate. Rather, I suppose, it was an attempt to comfort himself.

*Bovie*: Indeed it was. It seems to me that emphasis should be laid on Boëthius's success as a writer in this circumstance where it is so impossible to write at all. Here is a noble Roman, thrown into disgrace and disaster, falsely accused on a loyalty charge, confronting despair in jail. And instead of giving way to it, he summons his

strength, through the help of his fair lady Philosophy, and writes a beautiful book, a commentary on his condition in five well-apportioned parts.

*Bryson*: His time in prison may, of course, have been somewhat leisurely: he didn't have to pound rocks or anything like that. But he must have felt great bitterness. After all, he was only forty-five—it seems strange that any man could have accumulated so much knowledge in forty-five years—but his career had collapsed, he was a victim of lies in the court of a German emperor. How does he keep the bitterness out? How does he succeed in being so serene?

*Silk*: Eventually he reaches the conclusion that a philosopher cannot have bitterness; it's inconsistent with his way of life.

*Bovie*: I should say that at the beginning there is considerable bitterness, directed both toward the king himself, though not by name, and particularly toward his fellow Senators, who had failed to support him at the critical moment in his life.

*Bryson*: It's useful to say a word about the curious state that Rome was in in the sixth century of the Christian era. You had a kind of a mixture of the Teutonic and the ancient Roman.

*Silk*: Yes, you had a mixture of a very violently opposed sort. Of course, there had been Germanic peoples in the north of Italy since the fourth century. But with Theodoric's defeat of Odoacer and his accession to the throne, you had a whole new group of Germanic people coming in who had no notion of the Roman way of life, and who had all that to learn.

*Bovie*: I'm glad you said the *Roman* way of life, because I think that's why Boëthius's book has always appealed to men and why it's so modern today—why, for example, King Alfred wanted to and did translate it and why Queen Elizabeth is reputed to have translated it. He was the noblest Roman of them all, even in this Gothic atmosphere, because he found Reason as the guide to free him from the miseries and catastrophes that befell the late fifth century.

*Silk*: Yes, and his book has been the companion of kings, churchmen, and statesmen from the time of Charlemagne down to the time of Queen Elizabeth.

*Bovie*: Well, when the chips are down, what did the man have but Reason?

*Bryson*: Ah, that's a question which I hope you can answer if you read Boëthius with enough sympathy. I'm sure that's what he thought: what do I have but Reason? He had something more, though—he had faith. And I don't think you quite do justice to Boëthius as a great writer unless you realize the extraordinary extent to which he looked both ways: back upon the pagan world, which was dying or dead, and forward to the medieval world, in which he was such a tremendous influence. He had both the Christian faith and the Stoic philosophy. He was a curious mixture, and perhaps that's why he had so much influence through the Dark Ages, as we call them.

*Bovie*: "Faith" is a somewhat loaded word, although it's one that you can't escape in describing *The Consolation of Philosophy*. It seems to me that Boëthius had, as well as faith, imagination; he had a sense of beauty that led him to write in this form under these circumstances and to write a great book.

*Bryson*: Let's go back and look at the form. It isn't the ordinary "peace of mind" book. He doesn't say "Now let's get a good grip on ourselves and not be afraid." He has a much more elaborate and learned apparatus than that.

*Silk*: Yes, he seems to have selected, for reasons that I could never quite understand, a very ancient form, a mixture of prose and verse which had been used since, oh, before the days of Cicero.

*Bryson*: But he makes it effective artistically partly by the fact that he gets drama into it. The beautiful lady, Philosophy, actually comes to visit him in his prison cell and has long conversations with him in which she chides him and scolds him and comforts him.

*Silk*: Yes, I've often thought of *The Consolation of Philosophy* as a sort of tragedy in which the verse portions are like Euripidean choruses.

*Bovie*: The lyric quality is there.

*Bryson*: Is that why you say it's a great book?

*Bovie*: Because it's a great piece of writing. This combination of verse and prose strikes me as comparable to the church service, with its hymns on the one hand and its sermon on the other, both contributing to the whole impact on the imagination. I think Boethius, in hitting on this dual form, not only showed us that he was as good a prose writer as he was a poet, but also gave a curious mounting effect to the continuity of his thought. To me it's like climbing a mountain. You climb and climb, and these are the prose passages; you wind your way through the thought until you reach its conclusion; then you sit down to rest and survey the difficulties that you are slowly rising above, and this is the poetry.

*Silk*: I think you're quite right, although I should say that on many occasions the metrical portions perform another function: they even *advance* the argument sometimes, and certainly heighten the force of it.

*Bryson*: But you've got two kinds of argument here. In the first place, you've got a kind of summation of the classical philosophy that he looks back on, haven't you?

*Silk*: In a sense this man's doing what Cicero did a few hundred years before. He's popularizing philosophy, in a way; he's telling what Plato and Aristotle really taught.

*Bryson*: He sums it up for the Middle Ages, in a sense. But how good is that? After all, this man died at forty-five, credited with being a great engineer, a great musician, and a great statesman. Was he also a great scholar?

*Bovie*: I wonder what he did with his spare time!

*Silk*: I think perhaps his learning is not quite as great as it seems. Some of it may have come from the footnotes of his predecessors. But he was a remarkable Hellenist for his day, and something of a surprise to many of his friends.

*Bovie*: I was going to say that perhaps he has something a little better than erudition. He has a sense of know-how. He is not perhaps a creative thinker so much as one who knows how to use what he's inherited. For example, he knows Plato well and is the last Roman to hand this on to the Middle Ages, who loved Plato as they knew him



through Boëthius. The story of creation seems to me to be one of fundamental things in Plato's writing that Boëthius takes up and uses as a proof of God's work and of God's reality.

*Bryson*: Now aren't you getting into the real difficulties of this book? Here's a man who looks back to Plato and the *Timaeus* for his story of creation, and yet he is Christian.

*Silk*: There isn't in the book—at least, if it's there, I haven't been able to discover it—any actual statement that would indicate that Boëthius was a Christian, and yet we know that he was one.

*Bovie*: Well, I don't know what you would say about this, Mr. Silk, but I would hold Boëthius to be the noblest Roman of them all—and therefore a pagan.

*Silk*: I can understand that attitude. It is held by many people. He certainly writes in the pagan philosophical idiom, which to my mind he does partly because it is the tradition of the Christian apology. He had himself been an earnest amateur theologian of great professional insight. I have a feeling that *The Consolation of Philosophy* proves to his contemporaries, the laymen, that philosophy can be a great aid and support.

*Bryson*: In other words, it's the Christian contribution to antiquity; it's a way of showing that argument can lead to faith.

*Bovie*: He seems to me the same kind of pagan as Wordsworth, who said—didn't he?—"Great God, I'd rather be a pagan!" That is, he wanted both things at once.

*Bryson*: But when a man looks both forward and backward and uses an ancient idiom to express what must have been even then a quite fresh and living faith, he gets into contradictions. Isn't his Christian theology somewhat suspect?

*Bovie*: Well, you believe he was a Christian, Mr. Silk. Would you defend his theology?

*Bryson*: It doesn't sound exactly Christian to me; it sounds more Stoic.

*Silk*: Well, I quite agree with you. The idiom is that of pagan philosophy and Platonism, and of Stoicism in part. The purpose seems to be to put the reader in such a position that the necessity of faith is perfectly clear. It is Philosophy's compelling argument in favor of faith.

*Bovie*: Indeed, philosophy doesn't try to distract Boëthius from his trouble or woo him away from it with music or enchant him out of it, but rather she talks him into a realization that it isn't trouble after all. She argues him into believing what she knows to be true. The argument proceeds quite straightforwardly through an examination of Fortune: What is Fortune? I will tell you: Fortune is that which changes; therefore you mustn't despise her because in your case she did what she's supposed to do—she changed. Ergo, that source of despair is lost to you.

*Bryson*: But Boëthius comes back with the sentiment that Dante, probably taking it from Boëthius, made immortal—that wonderful phrase, "There is no greater sorrow than to recall a time of happiness in misery."

*Bovie*: *Nessun maggior dolore che ricordarsi del tempo felice nella miseria.*

*Bryson*: He's just being a very good writer—he makes the opposition strong.

*Bovie*: This is a step in the drama. The first step, in fact. And then Philosophy, the fair lady who's visiting him in his prison cell, says "But this isn't where you stop." She says, in effect: you are thinking about this; think ahead to the next step in it, namely, that there's no greater happiness than to have been happy; isn't that more sensible? And with his admission she proceeds to argue about other issues—good and evil, providence, free will and necessity—and there the book ends.

*Bryson*: But I'm still after Mr. Silk's idea of Boëthius as a Christian. Isn't it essential in Christian thinking, and isn't it something that Dante and St. Thomas Aquinas, who in a sense are successors of Boëthius, somehow had to get into their systems: that God is not an impersonal beneficence in the world, God is a person? This is essential to Christian thought, and I don't find it in Boëthius.

*Silk*: Perhaps I am prejudiced, and perhaps the metrical passages, the verse, have made me feel more warmly toward him. The book ends on a note of prayer, very personal prayer, and his hymn in the middle of the book uses terms that are strikingly similar to those of Christian prayer. While I shouldn't say the book has Christian phraseology, it's in perfect harmony with Christian feeling.

*Bryson*: Is it too neat to say that he gave an account of ancient philosophy but he did it in a Christian spirit?

*Silk*: I perhaps could agree with that.

*Bryson*: It sounds a little too neat. I'm a little afraid of it. He was more than merely Christian in spirit because, after all, he was a Christian thinker, too, wasn't he?

*Bovie*: Mr. Silk's emphasis on the pagan argument and the Christian ideal of the book leads us to ask about a word that the pagans are afraid of, and that the Christians make an issue of: the word "love." Boëthius says, as Dante said after him centuries later, it is love that makes the world go round, love that moves the sun. He's fascinated by this particular magnetism, and perhaps that implies the person of the Deity.

*Silk*: Perhaps it does. There are at least three poems in the *Consolation* that deal with love, plus another passage of prose. He begins with the love of his friends and proceeds to the harmony of the physical universe—which is, after all, love—and eventually, I believe, to a love of a higher sort.

*Bryson*: What does a man like this say to a time like ours? Here's a man who, in a sense, summed up the thought of the classical world for almost a thousand years. Today we actually know a good deal more about the classical world than Boëthius did, and we have much better ways of understanding what Plato and Aristotle really said. I suppose you might say that he loses his influence after Aquinas, because Aquinas succeeded in what Boëthius didn't quite succeed in doing—that is, in proving that reason leads to faith. But Boëthius started it. Now, what does he mean to us today?

*Bovie*: Well, the *Consolation* speaks to the modern age as strongly and convincingly as it did to King Alfred or to Queen Elizabeth, because it speaks to people who have problems. It seems to me that what

Boëthius has written is not only a beautiful work of art, but a very handy one. It's a do-it-yourself book, in the modern tradition of books that preach "peace of mind" and try to enable man to think his way clear of the problems that beset him.

*Silk*: Yes, I think you are quite right about that. I've always felt that it was the layman's book of philosophy, which is indicated, perhaps, by the fact that in the Middle Ages it circulated widely where technical books of philosophy were never found.

*Bryson*: And yet there's a good deal of very technical stuff in it, beautifully expounded. But the logical parts are quite severely rigorous in their thinking.

*Silk*: The authorities on medieval philosophy have often pointed out that it gives you beautiful definitions. Perhaps it offers no new contributions to philosophy, but there *is* a beautiful statement that satisfies both the philosopher on the upper plane and the layman who is innocent of philosophy altogether.

*Bovie*: It is indeed rigorous, isn't it? Even today I don't think we've quite mastered the problem of whether our condition is that of necessity or free will. We know that we're determined, and we know that we're free. This recurrent, universal problem of man's fate is studied by Boëthius at great length and with great intellectual rigor. It's a first-class piece of thinking, but it's also practical, isn't it?

*Silk*: I wonder if that couldn't have been part of its appeal—the very fact that the question was open.

*Bovie*: That's why it appeals today and will always appeal, because these problems do not disappear. They have to be mastered and we have to have peace of mind—with the emphasis on mind, perhaps.

*Bryson*: I was listening as you used that phrase, "peace of mind," which is pretty shopworn in the modern world, and was trying to catch your emphasis—whether it was going to be on peace or on mind.

*Bovie*: It's on mind, I think, perhaps because of the curiously poignant way in which the book suddenly stops before Boëthius has had time to finish off—well, of course, he was hauled off to be executed; he didn't *have* any peace. But he had freedom and he found his freedom through the exercise of his wits, and that's why I think it's so magical a book, really. The drama of it is that we have a man in jail but he's still a free man, we have a man *thinking*. And that is what the book, in my view, seems to tell the modern reader.

*Silk*: That brings another point to mind: it shows so clearly the plight of the scientific man. Here was Boëthius, who had been famous as a scientist—famous as an engineer—and who had never before looked at the moral problem of the world. He understands the physical universe, he knows God is there, he never questions it—but God cannot be interested in him. So the book begins. And, gradually, he convinces himself that God *is* interested in him—

*Bryson*: Have we quite stated what this way out really is? You just said, Mr. Bovie, that he thinks that one arrives at peace by way of the mind. You have to think your way out of your problems. But having used your mind on your problems, just before you're dragged away to be executed, what have you got?

*Bovie*: Well, you have a kind of freedom that rests on your true

understanding of the one important fact about man: that he is a moral being. And if this fact is true—as I think you said, Mr. Bryson, in your book *The Next America*—if this fact of man's moral being is firmly established in the individual's mind, he is then free and has no fear. He cannot lose. All he has to do is act in accordance with that proposition.

*Bryson*: Of course I'm glad that you spotted a Socratic idea in my writing, Mr. Bovie. It was pretty old when I picked it up, and it needs to be said over and over again.

*Silk*: I repeat: the plight of the scientific man, I think, is very clear in this book. And perhaps a solution to his problem.

*Bryson*: And that's where we are now, you think?

*Silk*: I think it must be a problem that occurs to the modern mind very frequently. With all of the questioning of older faiths, the questioning of so many accepted values, here is a book which shows you that you can feel your way to certainty.

*Bryson*: So many things about Boëthius are poetically so perfect. He invented a clock, which is a great step toward the modern world. All through the Middle Ages he was so influential—no, that isn't what I mean to say; he seems *not* to have been influential, just to have been read. Very little modern thinking is a direct result of these people having read Boëthius. But when we go back to him, he seems to be talking to us about our kind of problem.

*Bovie*: He poses the problem of freedom and necessity, abstract as it is, in the framework of time, which is a remarkable step forward in man's intellectual history. The irony of his being occupied with time—being able to make a better water clock than anyone else—is both pathetic and gripping when one remembers that his own time was running out.

*Bryson*: I wouldn't use the word pathetic for a man like Boëthius, Mr. Bovie. I should say that if ever there was a triumphant life, this was it. This was a life like Socrates's.

*Bovie*: I'm afraid that philosophy either is consoling or it isn't, and in this case it is consoling; therefore one sheds no tears over Severinus Boëthius, because he won out.

*Silk*: He reminds me of Plato himself, in a way. You have the philosopher in Plato, but also the imaginative poet. It is one of the delights of Boëthius, certainly, that the poet is so alive in the pages of counsel.

*Bovie*: Yes. I was thinking of Plato's recurrent image of the doctor, because Philosophy, the fair lady who comes to Boëthius in his cell, is hailed as his nurse and therapist, the one who will cure him. And that is a notion that goes very far back in man's thought. Socrates voices it time and again: What is the matter with me? Well, the only thing that's the matter with me, the reason I have a problem, is that my mind isn't working right, and therefore if I can begin to think coherently again and rationally I will be cured. It's a curious business of seeing despair and worry and anxiety as a sickness.

*Bryson*: Yes, that's very modern, Mr. Bovie. I should think the message of a man like this to the modern world is that you don't cure your ills by solving political or material problems. Those problems can

probably be solved, but your real ills lie deeper; and unless you can master your fate by understanding it, whether fortune is good or bad to you doesn't really make any difference. Which is exactly what Socrates said. But do you think that in the Middle Ages many people got real peace of mind this way, by this extraordinary, demanding discipline?

*Bovie:* That's the only way you can get peace of mind.

*Silk:* You don't run away from trouble.

*Bryson:* You have to be made to think about your problem lucidly.

*Bovie:* The lucid fount of good, Boëthius says—the pure spring of the idea of the good. You begin to think about that, and then you're on the way out.

*Silk:* I think we have the medieval record on that in the little notes in German, old Irish, French, and Italian that people made in all the old copies of this book.

*Bryson:* And in those notes, were people responding to the spirit, to the triumphant power of reason as shown in Boëthius, or were they just curious about this old Roman?

*Silk:* Oh, I think it's clear that they weren't merely curious, weren't merely studying a school text. They were looking for the message.

*Bovie:* You can see this, I think, in King Alfred's translation. *There* was a man who had practical reasons for looking at Boëthius. He had his problems, but he also had a mind and wanted to educate the young people of England. He picks up a wonderful phrase in Boëthius about God: what is God and is God prosperous? And Alfred's translation is: "His prosperity never waxes nor wanes because it is eternal." That's what it means to think about God. This kind of thing King Alfred learned and used from Boëthius.

*Bryson:* To the modern troubled spirit a man like this should be taken as a guide. He shows us what we have to do ourselves to earn this triumph which, under such terrible circumstances, *he* achieved.

## FEODOR DOSTOEVSKY

### *Memoirs from the House of the Dead*

(As broadcast October 28, 1956)

ALFRED KAZIN • ERNEST J. SIMMONS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* In a sense we're very fortunate that one of the world's greatest writers—great in his capacity to observe and feel and give an intense report on a personal experience—should have spent a considerable period in prison. Dostoevsky has always seemed to me to be morbidly concerned with evil, anyhow; and I've wondered, since he didn't go to prison for committing a crime, whether he was just im-

pregnated with the sense of evil because he had to associate for all those years with criminals? Mr. Simmons, I don't know anybody who knows more about Dostoevsky than you do. What really happened to him?

*Simmons*: It's a moot point as to whether he did or did not actually commit a crime. The professors differ a great deal on that question. It did so happen that as a young man in St. Petersburg he got himself associated with a group known as the "Petrashvsky circle." These young men were simply interested in reading what you might call contraband literature—literature that dealt with social revolt—but it is also true that Dostoevsky got himself very much involved in an offshoot of the Petrashvsky circle called the Durov group. This latter group was clearly interested not only in a contraband printing press, but in the possibility of producing contraband literature which they would disseminate among the people. It is even on record that Dostoevsky intended to write an article on socialism that would be printed on this press.

*Bryson*: And I suppose the professors might disagree as to whether, even if he did that, it really was a crime?

*Kazin*: Well, it *was* a crime, wasn't it, in nineteenth-century Russia?

*Simmons*: By law, yes.

*Kazin*: By law. But of course the punishment in this case certainly did not fit the crime. We all know this incredible story: he was sentenced to death and was lined up with nineteen others in Semyonov Square to be shot. He's often described it in novels like *The Idiot* and elsewhere; this experience was unforgettable, it made a burning impression that he never got over. A priest had passed among them, three of the men were already blindfolded and tied to posts, the soldiers raised their rifles, and then at the last minute—of course it had all been arranged beforehand, very sadistically, by the Tsar—an officer waved a white handkerchief and announced that they were not going to be shot after all. One was pardoned and the rest, including Dostoevsky, were sent to Siberia. There he had to serve four years at hard labor followed by another four to six years as a private soldier in a Siberian regiment. So that, all told, Dostoevsky's little experiment in reading forbidden literature cost him eight or ten years away from his beloved St. Petersburg.

*Simmons*: I would say, however, although Dostoevsky naturally did not admit to doing anything which he considered really criminal in the sense that he had actually tried to print contraband literature, that he did feel a very definite sense of guilt. And I tend to believe that he regarded his prison experience as expiation of that guilt.

*Bryson*: You say that Dostoevsky felt a sense of guilt, but wasn't he *born* with a sense of guilt?

*Simmons*: Well, that's rather extreme. I don't know whether any of us is ever born with a sense of guilt; it's something that we acquire in this civilization of ours.

*Bryson*: Of course I'm being extravagant. But this extraordinary intensity of temperament, this quiet, almost insane passion which is characteristic of Dostoevsky, even in a book like this—all that was

not produced by his prison experience. It was simply exaggerated, brought to the surface.

*Simmons*: Yes, I'd agree with that. But the book itself does more or less reveal that Dostoevsky felt that he was paying for a crime he had committed.

*Bryson*: How did he happen to choose this particular apparatus? Why didn't he just admit that he was writing a book about his own prison experiences? Everybody knew it, he wasn't concealing anything. Why does he set up this admirably conceived and unforgettable ex-prisoner whose manuscript he purports to have discovered? Why does he pretend it's a novel?

*Kazin*: He pretends it's a novel because he is a novelist to begin with. There's no reason for the form of the book except something inherent in the nature of the man's talent. But I think Dostoevsky's sense of guilt has very obvious Russian roots: the fact that the whole state and the whole law were one and the same would make any man who disagreed with them feel guilty.

*Simmons*: But having already served his four years in prison and another six years in the ranks before he was allowed to return to St. Petersburg and resume his literary life, don't you think it would have been a normal expectation for him to write a book about his prison experiences in his own person? Can you imagine any American, for example, going through an experience of this kind and not availing himself of the opportunity for sensationalizing in terms of the first person?

*Bryson*: And getting a lot of lecture engagements, too, in his own person!

*Kazin*: But surely there are many reasons for what he did. In the first place, some time had elapsed; Dostoevsky hadn't been allowed to write at all during his prison experience, and had hardly been allowed to read, except for the Bible. There must have been a great desire to do a creative job rather than a pictorial one. And surely, too, by this time he was more than convinced in some way that his early rebellion had been misguided. I think that to have written the story in the first person would have meant a square confrontation of his early rebellion. It would have meant going back to his early ideas, it would have meant supporting his position as a friend of the liberals. By taking this much of a perspective, through use of the novel form, he was removing himself from the naked and, to him, shocking radicalism of his youth.

*Simmons*: Of course, if he had undertaken to write a book about his prison experience in his own person, obviously one of the purposes behind it would have been to effect a kind of reform in prison life. Whereas I'm rather surprised to find in the *Memoirs from the House of the Dead* that there's hardly any effort at preaching reform.

*Bryson*: There's no effort to preach reform. But when I go back in my memory of this book and the things that stand out are counted, the list seems to me to have in it a great many scenes of brutality and oppression. Now isn't he saying this sort of thing *shouldn't* happen, when he tells about men who got fifteen hundred strokes of the club and were dragged to the hospital to recover so that they could have fifteen hundred more?

*Simmons*: No, I don't honestly believe that. There are, to be sure, several passages in the book where you might say that he's tendentious in the sense that he is urging some reforms. But they are rather genteel things, such as suggesting that the prisoners be allowed to have pets in the prison compound. This doesn't seem to me like a very urgent desire for reform. A number of years later, you know, Chekhov was to make a visit to the then "Botany Bay" of Russia, Sakhalin Island, where many prisoners were interned and suffered a great deal, and he wrote a purely eyewitness account of it which was very effective in achieving subsequent reforms in Russian prisons. I don't think Dostoevsky had this in mind. I tend to agree with Mr. Kazin that here we have Dostoevsky the novelist, who incidentally is telling the story of his own life in the guise of another person in his prison at Omsk in Siberia. And it seems to me that throughout the whole book the wonderful aspects of Dostoevsky the novelist come out clearly, especially in his concentration on characters. You recall character after character, such as Akim Akimovich, Kulikov, the Major, Sushilov, and particularly those wonderful characters, Gazin and Petrov and Orlov. These are all treated in the manner of the later Dostoevsky, the author of, let's say, *Crime and Punishment* or *The Brothers Karamazov*. And then, furthermore, the great scenes in *The House of the Dead* are treated very much as they would be treated in one of his later novels. They are not simply reportage, they are the results of a creative imagination.

*Kazin*: I think that as early as *The House of the Dead* Dostoevsky already saw this prison interlude entirely as a personal experience. He didn't feel compassion for the other prisoners in any political sense, merely a kind of slow human curiosity. I think, in many ways, that his own sense of himself as a nobleman, a petty nobleman who was being treated badly, is part of this. It's also partly the fact that he was no longer in sympathy with the ideals of his youth. And, most of all, he had been washed clean by this imprisonment. We have to remember that Dostoevsky is one of the few great men of letters in modern times who went through an experience such as Cervantes and Dante had gone through. Think of the incredible human pain: to be put through this mock execution, which could have driven a man insane—

*Bryson*: Which *did*!

*Kazin*: Yes, it drove one of his confederates out of his mind. To be put through all this must have meant that from now on he was outside the whole world, which before he had taken very seriously. He had fallen, as it were, into the posture of pain: by this time he took it for granted that the world was full of suffering people. So that there's no sympathy with other prisoners, but there is a sense of himself as an eyewitness who somehow deserves a better account of things than he's received from life so far.

*Bryson*: It seems to me you're making a very difficult and subtle point that I want to be quite sure I understand. Are you saying that his own suffering, which no doubt was very real, gave him a feeling that he understood suffering, but did not give him what we would call sympathy? And so he could maintain what I suppose you would call



his objectivity, his detachment from the tragedy that he saw all around him in Russia. He didn't actually share it, he merely felt that he was now equipped to observe it.

*Kazin*: Yes. And I would say that despite the legend of Dostoevsky as a great friend of the Russian people, as a great national hero, what one actually is impressed by in this book is the extreme autonomy he feels about himself. He is in prison with these men, but either as a nobleman or as an artist he didn't feel that he shared their condition entirely.

*Simmons*: I think I must differ with both you and Mr. Bryson on the degree of suffering that Dostoevsky endured in his prison. Unquestionably he did suffer, but let us look at the prison existence itself. To begin with, it was a kind of communal prison, was it not? He was not shut up in solitary confinement. Actually, the conditions of life that existed there were not vastly different, as he points out on a number of occasions in the book, from the kind of life that the peasants were leading on the outside.

*Bryson*: Although *he* wasn't a peasant.

*Simmons*: That is the point: his suffering derives largely from the fact that he was never admitted into the circle of friendship of these peasants because he was a gentleman. The life there, to be sure, has its barbaric aspects: the shaving of one half of the head of the prisoner, the frequent administrations of the rods and the birch—

*Bryson*: And wearing chains all day long—

*Kazin*: And all *night* long.

*Simmons*: And wearing chains, I will agree. Now these are all rather barbaric aspects of imprisonment. I wonder, however, whether they are as barbaric as keeping a man in a cell in solitary confinement, which is not unusual in our own prisons? But just think of this prison, where they have Christmas entertainments, where they go out working in the fields, where they have vodka parties—

*Bryson*: Well, surreptitiously.

*Simmons*: Where they are able to meet their girl friends occasionally, and enjoy various other aspects of communal living. Dostoevsky himself was a gentleman and was never really accepted by these prisoners, and this undoubtedly caused him a great deal of crucial suffering. Nevertheless, the life itself was not terribly severe for the rest of the prisoners.

*Kazin*: Well, Mr. Simmons, suffering is proportionate to the person who suffers. Dostoevsky probably suffered more simply crossing a street in St. Petersburg than a great many hard-boiled prisoners suffer from life imprisonment. He was, as we all know, an excruciatingly sensitive man and his novels are full of the cries of anguished nerves. The other prisoners in Siberia, most of them, were common criminals. Dostoevsky had impulsively joined a certain political circle. By this time he had been punished more than any person should be punished for such a crime, and no doubt, as a nobleman, as a writer, as a highly introspective and almost psychologically sensitive person, he must have said to himself: what am I suffering for? This was part of his isolation.

*Simmons*: I'm trying to seek out the real reasons for his suffering.

We've mentioned one of them: that he was a gentleman and was not accepted by these crude peasant murderers and cutthroats with whom he came in contact.

*Bryson*: Who felt more or less comfortable in the prison.

*Simmons*: Very much so, it would appear, judging from their activities there. I think another reason for his suffering is precisely the fact that it was a communal prison: he could never be alone. Furthermore, he was deprived of that kind of occupation which was natural to him: he could not get books; he had solely the Bible to read. It is this sort of existence, which he complains about a good deal in the book, that caused him the greatest amount of suffering. But I would also maintain that for Dostoevsky, the creative artist, there were many gains.

*Kazin*: Well, of course there were—but gains that he could see only after the experience, not necessarily during it. Remember, Mr. Simmons, that one of the types in this book which he genuinely admires is the strong man, the man who fears nothing, who's not abashed by prison. I think such a type appealed to Dostoevsky because here was a man whose forces were all intact, unlike his own. He always felt divided. We sense this so well in his other novels. He could never quite feel that he was either the rebel that he had been, or the orthodox novelist that he was going to be. What must be really cruel is to suffer all this—physical deprivation, deprivation of reading matter, uncleanness, squalor—to suffer all this without feeling that you've *earned* your punishment.

*Bryson*: But do you see what you and Mr. Simmons are doing with this line of talk? You're raising a doubt in my mind as to whether Dostoevsky's analysis of the psychology of the prisoner really means anything—because you're making him out to be so exceptional a prisoner.

*Kazin*: But this surely is a very essential point of any literary psychology. We took it for granted that despite the extremeness of the author, his sense of things is perfectly objective and sincere. Any writer, put into this position, must be in a state of extreme sensitivity and suffering. It's true of all the great prisoners, surely, and yet their reports are, for just that same reason, wonderfully objective, firm, sober accounts of things. I think it's quite clear that what makes this book great is the sense of detail, which in phrase after phrase gives you the actual physical feeling of the prison. When you read this book, you know exactly what this communal room smelt like; what it felt like to wear a uniform which had two collars; what it felt like to this other man to be chained to the wall day in and day out with a bed right close to it; what it felt like to go through this terrible experience of being beaten, sent to the hospital to recover, then being taken out to be beaten again. But most of all there's a sense of the interminability of everything.

*Simmons*: That is, the being in prison almost without end, as was true of some of the convicts. You recall from the book the symbol of the captured eagle, who is brought in wounded for the delectation of the prisoners, and how they finally released it; one of them mentions that "he sniffed the air of freedom." Well, Dostoevsky himself

must very frequently have sniffed the air of freedom in his impatience to get out.

*Kazin*: One of the most telling physical details in the book, too, is the description of the monotony of the infinite expanse of the Siberian steppe. There is an account, fairly late in the book, of the prisoners breaking up alabaster on the banks of the river. To Dostoevsky this tedious work is a perfect example of the uselessness of the prisoners' existence; it's made-up work, meaningless and irrational, and its only purpose is to keep them busy. He describes very vividly and hauntingly the dreariness of both the work and the landscape on every side. Using a homely image, he says: "The steppe stretched out for fifteen hundred versts to the south like an immense tablecloth."

*Simmons*: This is only one of the passages that raise this book far above the level of straight reporting of a prison experience. For example: the description of life in the hospital, or that wonderful description of the prisoners being taken for their bath. You remember all these branded individuals, still in their chains, these naked bodies with their backs often scarified by the lash in this pandemonium of a public bath house, all of which reminded him, he said, of hell. This is simply a brilliant description just like the description of the Christmas plays. You remember how the Christmas season begins with the prisoners all praying and being deeply reverent, and yet how it ends in a vast vodka debauch.

*Bryson*: Dostoevsky describes so convincingly the sense of being estranged from oneself, which is the result of prison experience. But wouldn't you say that these serfs, these agricultural slave-peasants who were around him, didn't feel this estrangement? It was an experience peculiar to a man of his temperament and sensitivity which would not have been true of the rest of the people at all.

*Kazin*: At his highest I think it's clear that Dostoevsky projects from himself a sense of the estrangement of everyone there. A man in prison lives only for the future; his surroundings give him no sense of comfort or recognition. If you add to this the squalor, the crowding, the lack of dignity, the lack of privacy, and also the immense monotony of the world around him—which must have looked rather like the primitive settlements in the Wild West of, let's say, the 1850s or '60s—then you get the sense that man is always harking back either to his past, his memory, or to the future. And that, of course, is a perfect example of Dostoevsky's telling psychology—

*Bryson*: Most of them looked to the future.

*Kazin*: Yes. But another side of his psychological genius, shown as early as this book, is his saying, for example: "I used to ask myself whether they were really they, whether they were really as calm as they seemed to be. All the convicts felt themselves in an alien element with which they could not reconcile themselves."

*Simmons*: Don't you think that that is just one of the impressive aspects of the book? That is, there is hardly a scene concocted by him, hardly a character that he presents, in which he fails to indulge in this peculiar penetrating kind of psychological dissection that you find in his later novels. I personally feel that the whole book indicates very clearly that Dostoevsky went through a searing experience, but that

he derived from it these constants on which his future creative development is based.

*Kazin*: Yes, I agree.

*Simmons*: Now one of these constants, I think, was the deepening of his religious faith. He went into that prison, from all we can tell, as a person with somewhat agnostic leanings. He certainly came out of it with a profound faith in the Orthodox Church, although I don't mean to suggest that he ever lost that species of doubt about God which is one of the characteristics of his perennial search throughout his life. It is rather important that shortly after he came out of prison he wrote to one of his friends that he was still searching for God. But, nevertheless, in prison he had found a degree of faith. He makes the remarkable statement that if Christ were outside the truth and the truth were outside Christ, nevertheless he would prefer to remain with Christ rather than with the truth.

*Kazin*: Yes. On the other hand, one of the future marks of genius in this book is his sense that the real psychology of people is not harmonious, not symmetrical. Dostoevsky with reason has been called the ancestor of the twentieth-century novel, because in all of his great books he already sees character as illogical. People have traits which should not, in all honesty, be reconciled with other traits. And in this book one of the things which wins us is that although people pass before our eyes too quickly to be remembered always, when we do see them we see them exactly as they must have appeared to the mind of a man who does not try to reconcile these traits. That is the thing which so many novelists of our time have spoken of: they say that character is not logical, that character is a reality to which we try to gain access as to a divine truth. This already is in his portraits of certain people. The religious side of Dostoevsky which became so strong afterwards was based from the very beginning, surely, on a sense that suffering, in some way, is a mystical element; people who had suffered had been brought to a new awareness of things beyond themselves.

*Simmons*: This is developed in the book itself. The whole doctrine of salvation by suffering, though it had appeared to Dostoevsky before he ever entered the prison, was unquestionably deepened by his prison experience. He began to realize that in Christ, in the whole notion of achieving salvation by suffering, one found one's peace. And I think that in his descriptions of some of the prisoners he tends to attribute this very doctrine to them. You may remember the prisoner who actually thought of hitting the major over the head with a brick, possibly killing him, simply because he felt the need of suffering.

*Kazin*: Yes, but suffering doesn't always mean something mystical. To Dostoevsky it also means that it removes what we would call the social, the artificial, element in society. A man is washed clean by suffering in Dostoevsky's mind, so that the sincerity of the person's soul is shown only when suffering has removed from him the artificial restraints. In a curious sort of way this goes back to Rousseau, as so much Russian literature of the nineteenth century does—to the belief that society has falsified man. Man is really true to himself in a state of suffering. Once he's gone through the suffering, once his personality

has been broken up into so many different cubes, then perhaps he needs to put it together again with the help of this extreme mystical faith which you've described.

*Bryson*: I suppose one of the things that one gets out of rereading this book is an astonishing sense of the change that has come over the Russian people. From a people characterized by this profound sense of suffering as salvation, they have changed into what—at a distance, at any rate—looks like a group of people who believe that by the mere erection of machines and roads and bridges and things of that sort one can attain not only happiness but eternal salvation.

## VICTOR HUGO

### La Légende des Siècles

(As broadcast November 4, 1956)

GERMAINE BREE

•

JUSTIN O'BRIEN

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: Hugo's exile was voluntary. He wasn't forced to leave France in the middle of the nineteenth century when Louis Napoleon came to power; he just couldn't stay in a country that he thought was under a tyrant. But it didn't seem to hold him down very much—if anything could have held Victor Hugo down!

*O'Brien*: No. And one proof of it is that during those years of exile he was more prolific than he ever had been before.

*Bryson*: But that's like saying that Niagara Falls has suddenly doubled its volume! How could anybody be *more* prolific than Victor Hugo had always been?

*O'Brien*: Perhaps he didn't have as many interruptions in exile as he had in his normal life in Paris.

*Bryson*: What was he trying to do with *The Legend of the Centuries*?

*Brée*: It seems that when he was in exile, on the Island of Guernsey, he had taken on the habit of thinking in terms of all humanity. He had a vision, he tells us, of the "wall of the centuries," and along that wall he saw humanity, simultaneously and successively, struggling up from darkness towards the light. He wanted, he tells us, in *La Légende des Siècles* to give us this image of man—man changing, man trying to reach the light of God.

*Bryson*: And freedom?

*Brée*: As far as he is concerned, it is our capacity for freedom that makes us different from the animals and the stones and the rocks, about which he speaks too. It is the capacity, really, to progress—to go upward.

*Bryson*: And yet he didn't, so to speak, begin at the beginning and write an epic of man's development as a person of less imagination might have done.

*O'Brien*: No. But he had a very clear concept of an epic. It was to be composed of a whole series of small narrative poems—different in their metre in some cases, although most of them are written in the traditional French alexandrine line; different in their length; and different even in their importance within the constant flow. He carries it from the beginning of mankind, with the story of Eve, down to the present day, and even looks forward beyond his time.

*Bryson*: Did he understand Eve as well as he seems to have understood all the other women in his life?

*O'Brien*: He saw in Eve the eternal woman, most certainly, and the eternal mother of humanity. But he also indulges in some very fine lines about the delicate, tender flesh of woman in which we can sense the Hugo of the many love affairs.

*Brée*: I should add to this that Hugo is one of the rare poets who don't see Eve as the woman who got man into trouble. He rather puts her on a high pedestal.

*Bryson*: This is the infallible French gallantry, Miss Brée. He's always gentlemanly.

*Brée*: And here the gentleman *and* the lover.

*Bryson*: I should think that even in the hands of the very greatest poets a figure like Eve would be something grandiose but shadowy, and that Hugo would fail to give it the lyric, sensuous intensity that is characteristic of him. But he doesn't. How does he succeed in avoiding that?

*Brée*: Well, he took Eve not at the time of the Fall, but at the moment when she realizes she is going to become the mother of mankind. So that the poem on Eve is not a poem of the Fall, but a poem of maternity, fecundity, and continuing life.

*Bryson*: But going on from Eve, how does he pick these other moments in history that he uses as subjects?

*O'Brien*: Rather arbitrarily. He chooses moments which he thinks are of high significance for the history of humanity. For instance, to take just a few examples, the poem entitled *Conscience* concerns Cain's plight after he has killed his brother Abel; he is pursued everywhere by the Eye of God, or the eye of his own conscience, however one wants to interpret it. A magnificent poem. Then, to skip way down toward the end of the collection, he deals with Dante's experience in hell—seeing the people exonerated of guilt for the misfortunes of mankind and the rulers blamed, then going on from the rulers to the Pope. He is here writing a single poem which is an epic poem, but which is part of a much larger epic—

*Bryson*: It's extraordinary, too, because he's putting modern nineteenth-century politics into Dante's thirteenth-century politics and making it stand up. But going back to the one about Cain: does it seem to solve anything about the problem of evil that Cain is pursued constantly—wherever he goes, no matter where he hides, no matter what he puts up as protection—by this Eye that he can't get away from?

*O'Brien*: It may not solve any problem, but at least it states the fact that there is no escape for the man who commits evil; he will be tortured for all eternity. Again and again Hugo returns to this theme of constant torture.

*Brée*: The Eye appears suddenly on the horizon of humanity, and neither Cain nor the rest of us will ever get rid of it. That is to say, humanity now will always bear the burden of murder, since humanity always murders—in war, politics, and so on.

*Bryson*: There's something that I've never been able to find in Victor Hugo, here or anywhere else: I don't quite know what he ultimately thinks about the problem of evil and man's suffering. After all, Cain suffered as much as anybody—he suffered more than Abel. And yet Hugo seems to have this fairly simple idea that just by punishing Cain you've somehow solved the problem of man's involvement in evil. Now he didn't really think anything so simple as that, did he?

*Brée*: Many of the things he thought were perhaps a little simple, but I don't believe he really thought that punishing Cain was the ultimate significance of the Eye.

*Bryson*: Well, that's what I'm getting at. Now here's the murderer, pursued by his conscience in the form of the Eye, as Mr. O'Brien said. What does that mean?

*Brée*: It means that man, at the beginning of his slow march out of darkness, does acquire precisely that judgment—that Eye. He will never get rid of it now.

*O'Brien*: It's the "Thou shalt not kill" that comes out.

*Bryson*: The upward step comes from the fact he's acquired a conscience.

*Brée*: Yes. And then he goes on.

*Bryson*: The man goes on—and Hugo. And *how* he goes on!

*O'Brien*: And how he goes on—endlessly, it seems, with poem after poem, the alexandrine lines flowing off his pen with apparently no effort on Hugo's part at all.

*Bryson*: As a student of French, Mr. O'Brien, can you find in this immense cataract of poetry any carelessness, anything slipshod? Does his syntax ever get wobbly?

*O'Brien*: No, never his syntax, and probably never his use of images. Hugo was, as one modern writer has called him, the greatest assembler of images and the finest master of French syntax that the language has ever known. He was not careless in those regards. He was careless in his use of erudition, but it is perhaps unfair to blame Hugo for not possessing, on every subject, the erudition of the twentieth century. In fact, he didn't always possess the erudition of his own period. Hugo had a consummate gift for making up names—whether they were place names that he turned into the names of characters, as in some of his Spanish cycles, or whether they were Biblical names, about which there is a certain confusion anyway. He would make up a town or a region in the Holy Land which didn't exist and which has bothered scholars ever since.

*Bryson*: Yes. It wouldn't have bothered him, of course. Well, now, how does man climb upward through this spate of beautiful French?

*Brée*: Through all this beautiful French there runs a sort of struggle. On one side there is the camp, one might say, of the people clothed in light. They are the knights in the medieval cycle. And on the other side is the camp of the beings who are really clothed in dark-

ness and who are in league with the material, blind forces of the world—who belong to the Chaos, as Hugo would say. At every stage the forces of good struggle and win one more step. It's always man against the brute forces of nature, in a way.

*Bryson*: And man against man, too, Miss Brée.

*Brée*: Except that Hugo's men are really giants. None of them are of ordinary size.

*O'Brien*: We get the story, for instance, of King Kanut, which is one of the most magnificent word pictures that Hugo ever painted. The poem is called *The Parricide*. After killing his father, Kanut becomes a great ruler, and then he, too, dies. And on his way to the eternal judgment, in his white shroud, he passes under a vault from which blood drops onto him, drop by drop, until his white gown is spotted all over; eventually, by the time he arrives at the eternal gates, he's wearing a scarlet shroud and he doesn't dare go in at all. So he must wander eternally. This is again the story of Cain.

*Bryson*: But isn't that a sample of Hugo's extraordinary myth-making power? That's not an old story, is it? I mean, it's *his* story.

*O'Brien*: That's his story, yes. He has made it up.

*Bryson*: I asked you that question because it seems to illustrate a point that you hinted at before: this man could take the most grandiose of themes and not be in the least daunted by it—he could tackle practically anything—but he could also write persuasively about quite intimate things. For example, the poem about Boaz and Ruth.

*Brée*: It's a very charming poem and one of the most human. Hugo saw in it one of the important moments of this slow but great human progress. Boaz had no wife, no son, and yet from Boaz was to stem the race of David. Ruth was coming across the fields to Boaz and he didn't know it; Hugo saw it as one of the great moments of the world, since, as Ruth approaches, it means that the salvation of humanity is being prepared. In the dream that Boaz has he sees great trees springing up. At the bottom is a king singing, and that is David; at the top dies a God, and that is the Christ. And so this really beautiful poem is a poem of great confidence for the future of humanity.

*Bryson*: In an absolutely miraculous way it is a poem of great sweetness, of great charm, of great simplicity. Read some of *Booz Endormi*, Miss Brée.

*Brée*: Well, I will read just the three last stanzas, in which Ruth has arrived; she's lying at the feet of Boaz, and both of them sleep in this great peace that has descended upon the earth:

*Ruth songeait et Booz dormait; l'herbe était noire;  
Les grelots des troupeaux palpitaient vaguement;  
Une immense bonté tombait du firmament;  
C'était l'heure tranquille où les lions vont boire.*

*Tout reposait dans Ur et dans Jerimadeth;  
Les astres émaillaient le ciel profond et sombre;  
Le croissant fin et clair parmi ces fleurs de l'ombre,  
Brillait à l'occident, et Ruth se demandait,*



*Immobile, ouvrant l'oeil à moitié sous ses voiles,  
Quel dieu, quel moissonneur de l'éternel été,  
Avait, en s'en allant, négligemment jeté  
Cette faucille d'or dans le champ des étoiles.*

*O'Brien*: Isn't it characteristic of Hugo to describe the time of day as "the hour when the lions go down to drink"?

*Bryson*: Yes, it is characteristic of him. And to me that makes it all the more extraordinary that he is able to give such intimate sweetness to the scene, as well as this background of grandiosity. But he isn't always as sweet as that, is he?

*Brée*: No. He is very often full of violence, as we have seen. Naturally, most of the poems in this cycle are concerned with strife, but some of his other poems are quite intimate. One of these is a poem, known by a great many French school children, in which he develops this theme of the liberation of humanity through love. It's about the poor fisherman's wife who takes the two children of her dead neighbor even though it will add to her own toil. Hugo has said that the whole movement upward toward the light was brought about by this fight against poverty and ignorance which he calls "the devil-black chain of humanity."

*Bryson*: It is not only the great knight striding on ahead but also the little people carrying their share of the burden.

*Brée*: That's it.

*Bryson*: What I was thinking about, when I said he was not so sweet, was the worm. Why does he put in this rather dreadful and repellent epic of the worm?

*O'Brien*: The epic of the worm, which goes on far too long, is doubtless there to show that Hugo could be as macabre as other poets of his time—some of the late romantic poets like Baudelaire, for instance. Also, it illustrates his theory that the all-devouring worm is going to get us, and everything we create, in the long run. And yet—

*Bryson*: But man is saved.

*O'Brien*: Because, toward the end of the poem, Hugo turns back on his own thoughts and gives us a contrary argument.

*Bryson*: Well, what can you say about a man who could produce a work like this? Hugo is extraordinary to me, an outsider in this business, but even great French critics who admire him, and who give him the final judgment of greatness, always do it with a kind of smile. One always seems to smile behind Hugo's back. Now *why*? Is it the man's own megalomania?

*Brée*: Well, he certainly had a strong tendency to identify himself with God. He thought that God spoke to him and that he, in turn, spoke to the world. He thinks of himself as a giant—and, in a sense, he was one. But I suppose the tremendous idea that he had of himself is almost incredible to most human beings.

*Bryson*: Does that mean that we have to laugh at a man who is godlike and thinks so?

*Brée*: Well, it is a little ridiculous.

*Bryson*: But he did, after all, create such an enormous number of works that he had some excuse for feeling that way.

*O'Brien*: Hugo had carved on one of his chairs—a sort of pseudo-Gothic chair that he liked to think had come down in his family from Gothic times—the device *Ego Hugo*. It's the same kind of megalomania that we find when he signs a photograph for an admirer: "Victor Hugo listening to God."

*Bryson*: And I suspect he really meant "God listening to Victor Hugo."

*O'Brien*: It was certainly a dialogue.

*Bryson*: But in spite of the tendency to put a little sneer at the end of our praise of him, he was a very great poet—certainly the greatest poet of the nineteenth century in France, and one of the greatest in the whole history of French literature, wouldn't you say?

*O'Brien*: Yes, even Gide said it. When someone asked him who was the greatest poet of France, he replied: "Hugo, hélas."

*Bryson*: The sneer, again. It's too bad. But isn't his personal life somewhat responsible? After all, here was a man who had a wife and a family and an official mistress, and yet, at the end of his life—how old was he when he died?

*O'Brien*: Eighty-three.

*Bryson*: Even at that age he couldn't keep his hands off the kitchen maids around his own house: doesn't that make him a bit absurd?

*O'Brien*: It does. It seems to diminish the great man. And yet it's so much a counterpoint to his own fecundity in literature. The same energy that he put into *The Legend of the Centuries*, into *Les Misérables*, into his plays and *Notre Dame de Paris*, he also put into his love life.

*Brée*: Perhaps the strong characteristic of Hugo is that he never took any part of his life lightly. He would never think of saying to himself that one of these loves was unimportant; he would give all of them some cosmic importance, and that is perhaps why we smile at his grand words and his grand attitude. He tried to convince his mistress that he was saving her soul, literally. He gave her an awful lot of manuscripts to write up for him and she worked for him very devotedly, but even to the very end he would not admit that she had saved her soul, because she had been an actress and she hadn't been too faithful.

*Bryson*: And so he kept her locked up, so that she would have to be faithful to him in his fashion. But what does Hugo mean in France now?

*Brée*: Hugo still means a great deal, I think, to the French people, to the mass of readers—

*Bryson*: As poet or as novelist?

*Brée*: I would say first as novelist, and I don't think Mr. O'Brien would disagree with me there.

*O'Brien*: Yes, I'm sure of it. Certainly as the author of *Les Misérables* and *Notre Dame de Paris* and *Ninety-Three* he is constantly read by the French people.

*Bryson*: Now why? As *he* would say, he wanted to be read as a prophet. Is he? Of course everybody here reads *Les Misérables*, which has been translated, and I suppose pretty well translated. It's even

been made into several movies, as *Notre Dame de Paris* has also. But we don't think of Victor Hugo as a great prophet of human events and freedom, do we?

*Brée*: No; I think that if he's read, it's because of his great power of imagination and his real generosity. I think he appeals to the poor people of the world. He really feels for their position, for their suffering. And that is the appeal he makes: an appeal to our emotions, the simple emotions.

*O'Brien*: As he should, because of his general humanitarianism—which was one of his most moving inspirations. But I think one reason why he's not read as the prophet that he wanted to be is because he himself did not publish in his lifetime the two long poems, *God* and *The End of Satan* as they were entitled, which he intended as prologue and epilogue to *The Legend of the Centuries*. Consequently, people do not see *The Legend of the Centuries* in quite the same prophetic light.

*Bryson*: And I suppose one reason why he's not known as a *poet* in this country is because his poetry has hardly been translated at all, has it? If you could translate Hugo in the first place.

*Brée*: There have been many attempts, but not so many as of other poets who were contemporaries of his.

*O'Brien*: Perhaps it's because there would be so *much* to translate—thousands and thousands of lines. I imagine that a translator would really hesitate in front of that.

*Bryson*: But I should think somebody might attempt to translate, out of this vast flood of great poetry, enough of it to bring to Americans some sense of the power of this man over words, of his extraordinary capacity to maintain such a flow, and of his ability to encompass such grandiose themes.

## ADOLF HITLER

### *Mein Kampf*

(As broadcast November 11, 1956)

ERIC LARRABEE • GEORGE N. SHUSTER • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: Hitler went to prison almost without reluctance. He saw it as an opportunity to be relieved of the detail and turmoil of street fighting and the kind of politics he was practising; it gave him a chance to think, and to plan the strategy of his attack on world peace. The result was this monstrous book, a blueprint for upsetting all that the world meant in our day in the way of civilization.

*Larrabee*: That blueprint is a very difficult one to approach, if only because so much of it has been carried out and because it is such an effort to consider the author himself as a human being.

*Bryson*: Was he a human being?

*Larrabee*: I think we have to give him the benefit of the doubt—but so many horrors have intervened, for which he bears a large measure of the responsibility, that it's difficult to look back on him and give him that credit.

*Shuster*: This book seems to me a sort of continuation, a projection into a new dimension, of what he had been doing up to that time. He had acquired a very considerable reputation in a number of salons in Munich and elsewhere as a man who could expound the ultra-nationalist ideology; and here, in prison, he had an opportunity to make a resumé of these various pronouncements—give them a semblance, at least, of form—and make it possible for him to appear not merely as a parlor orator but also as a prophet.

*Larrabee*: And didn't he feel, inasmuch as other members of the movement had written books and pamphlets, that it was incumbent on him to show that he, too, could write a book—that he wasn't just an ignoramus from the Viennese slums?

*Bryson*: He had been called that, hadn't he? Some of his associates in the founding of the Nazi movement in Germany spoke of him as a gifted ignoramus.

*Shuster*: The very interesting thing to me is that after his emergence as an author he never quotes any living rival, although he mentions the dead with great respect.

*Bryson*: At the point of writing *Mein Kampf* Hitler dismisses all the people who had originated the movement, who had really done more than he to get it started, and wipes the record clean. That, of course, is the foundation of his dictatorship.

*Larrabee*: And you would think, to read the book, that every idea in it is his own personal idea. He introduces an idea by saying, in effect, "and it then became clear to me that—" and there follows something which might have been picked anywhere out of the nineteenth century. Certainly none of those predecessors are ever acknowledged by him.

*Bryson*: But his purpose was to eliminate all of his companions from public attention. This is a thing that's always puzzled me: how clearly did Hitler really foresee what he was doing?

*Shuster*: I think it is probably correct to say that as early as the age of nineteen he had a blueprint of what purposes he was to serve, and what position he was to occupy in German society.

*Bryson*: Which was at the top.

*Shuster*: Which was, naturally, at the top. It was the leadership principle that would save the world, and he saw himself as the leadership principle incarnate.

*Bryson*: That's the most extraordinary thing about him, really, because there was nothing in his background, nothing in his achievements up to that time, nothing that he had done which would give him any reason for thinking he could do this—except his own inner conviction.

*Larrabee*: Even by his own account, in the early chapters of *Mein Kampf* where he described his days as an aspiring architect, he is willing to say that he was a failure and to describe the bitterness

of his dissatisfaction in rather clear terms. He mentions his frustrations with avidity, as a matter of fact, in order to demonstrate how different all that was from the real man who was coming into being now and who would have his chance on the stage of history.

*Bryson*: Yes, but he did something more than establish his right to be a man of culture and to wipe from history, really, his rivals. He set forth doctrines.

*Larrabee*: That's a pretty flimsy right, though. His learning is padded around the edges by many hands. I'm not sure myself what his sources were. I wonder if Mr. Shuster can throw some light on them?

*Shuster*: It so happens that once upon a time I spent a great many days digging into the sources, but primarily they were certain Austrian journals and newspapers. In addition to that, he unquestionably read rather widely in the literature of nationalism. There is virtually not a single author of the old ultra-nationalist configuration who does not leave his trace in this book.

*Larrabee*: But never named. He doesn't mention the authors.

*Shuster*: I know. I don't think he read Fichte and Hegel, but a man he mentions very frequently is Dr. Karl Lueger, a former mayor of Vienna. And it's primarily out of the journals which supported Lueger's party that his early doctrine is taken.

*Bryson*: Here's what we're saying, Mr. Shuster: we're saying that this man, who had no genuine grasp of these things, took second- or third-hand statements of ideas that were very general and out of them made a book which shook the world.

*Shuster*: Exactly. The phenomenon that we have here is the transfiguration of a very common man—a very, very ordinary individual—who's proud, as a matter of fact, of his common-mannishness. And in this book, through a distillation of emotion—and, to some extent, of reason—he's able to bring this poison to bear on mankind.

*Larrabee*: With a kind of lunatic clarity of his own, in which he sees everything fitting precisely into place, just where he wants it.

*Bryson*: It's an emotional clarity, isn't it, rather than a rational clarity? There are sentences in this book that really don't mean anything.

*Larrabee*: But it has the rationality of the madhouse. *He* sees everything in a clear-cut relationship to everything else, and he imposes on this his own inner logic; there are times when you almost give in to the rhythm of his mind. When he is explaining, for instance, how he learned the art of what he calls "right reading," which is the ability to read a book and remember only what you want to remember, he is perfectly consistent.

*Bryson*: But what about the doctrine? You said there was some reason in it, Mr. Shuster. How much reason? These doctrines that he sets forth—the leadership principle, the hegemony of Germany over the rest of Europe, ascribing all guilt to the Jews, and so on—what about these doctrines?

*Larrabee*: Well, my view of them is that Hitler confronted a problem which was a very real one. This was the emergence of very

powerful nationalistic feeling in central Europe. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was decomposing, and later on did actually fall apart; new states had arisen; Germany was in an inferior position. Now what was his solution for the problem of these emerging nationalisms?

*Shuster*: The hegemony of Germany—which, from his point of view, was the strongest and, biologically speaking, the purest of all these national groups and which, therefore, must set its seal on this seething mass of men. That was the solution. And the way in which you carry it out, according to Hitler, is first to strengthen the Germans so that all the rest of it will follow almost automatically. He makes it into a kind of building-up of the forces of nature in order to surmount the weaknesses of human society.

*Larrabee*: Also, he held up to the decadence of Europe in that period not only a puritanical idea of "racial cleanliness," but the image of the clean-cut Hitler *Jugend* youths that he manufactured in such large quantity afterward. He offered at least a startlingly direct, savage solution to the turmoils of the social world around him.

*Bryson*: You're talking as if the book were a weapon, Mr. Larrabee.

*Larrabee*: Well, surely he intended it as a weapon. Oddly enough, I should have said, it had exactly the opposite role. Certainly it had very few readers.

*Bryson*: More influence than readers. But it had immense sales.

*Shuster*: Yes. Most of them, I think, were forced sales.

*Bryson*: Then nobody *read* it?

*Shuster*: Surprisingly few people, I think, ever read the book through. Surprisingly few.

*Bryson*: You and the proofreader.

*Shuster*: Well, I *had* to read the thing through. But if it hadn't been made a matter of compulsion, I doubt whether it would ever have had an audience of formidable size. Of course, passages from it—selected ideas—had tremendous impact.

*Larrabee*: And when the ideas were put into speeches, the ideas became swords.

*Bryson*: Would you say that this man was not a great writer in any ordinary literary sense but was, perhaps, a great orator?

*Larrabee*: That is what he intended to be, and he speaks in the book of the inadequacy of the written word as a political tool. He describes the reciprocal effect of the crowd on the speaker as one of the ways in which the speaker's words become political weapons.

*Bryson*: Did you ever hear him speak, Mr. Shuster?

*Shuster*: Yes, I heard him speak, and it was an interesting phenomenon indeed. You have to visualize, of course, the kind of scene which he prepared for himself.

*Bryson*: This was deliberate showmanship—

*Shuster*: Deliberate. First of all, there was the setting—bunting, flags, signs—designed by him. It created an almost Wagnerism atmosphere. The second thing was the tension created by the presence of the Storm Troopers, and by the audience's wondering what would happen if somebody dared to object or to heckle. And then, in came this man with his burning eyes, filled with livid hatred and also with something

that you could only call super-patriotism—I can't think of any other name for it. When he began to talk in a peculiarly raucous, direct, almost chanting manner, the audience was fascinated as if it were witnessing a sombre drama.

*Bryson:* And you were fascinated?

*Shuster:* I was not.

*Bryson:* You were touched?

*Shuster:* I was neither touched nor fascinated. I thought all the while of certain soapbox orators down in Union Square. But his audiences, even people who were opposed to him, as well as those who spoke his language and to some extent shared his point of view, were overwhelmed by the impact of this thing.

*Bryson:* He is very honest—if you can say such a thing about *Mein Kampf* and its author—about stating plainly that this is what he intends to do and *will* do.

*Shuster:* Yes, he had no secrets, curiously enough, about his methods. He had none of Goebbels's Machiavellian cynicism—hiding things from the people, playing poker with one card up the sleeve. He had all his cards on the table.

*Bryson:* But you've heard it said that Hitler's real secret of secrecy was to be so completely open and aboveboard that nobody would believe him. If it had leaked out, they might have believed it; by proclaiming it to the world he made people think he wasn't serious.

*Larrabee:* But, to judge by the book, he thought it was the simple truth of the matter, and so obviously right that it didn't make any difference. He speaks of the leader as a man who must thrust himself forward; he must *take* command, otherwise he is not a leader.

*Shuster:* If I may object a little bit, I think I would like to say that there is in this book more reasoned-out political thinking than we have given it credit for. For example, if you turn to the passage in which he describes the future of Germany as he visualizes it: this is to be secured through the process of creating a space in Europe in which 200,000,000 Germans can live, not 70,000,000. These ideas, of course, he takes from the school of geographers such as Haushofer. And then he posits the following proposition: that Russia is decomposing from within, and is making the same ominous mistakes that it has subsequently made. Russia is not going to be powerful, he says. He's going to make an alliance with the British, which will enable him to compel the Russians to surrender adequate terrains so that he can create this *lebensraum* he thinks he needs.

*Larrabee:* And all of this is fitted in very shrewdly with his other doctrines of the evilness of international finance. He wants a Germany that is like a pyramid—with the bottom in the right place instead of, as with other European countries, turned upside down.

*Bryson:* Does that lead us into the question of his anti-Semitism, which we haven't even touched upon? Did he have any special reason for hating the Jews, or was this just another political maneuver?

*Larrabee:* He claims that he didn't. But as he explains how he came to what he calls a logical conclusion, it begins to look as though it were an awfully convenient one for him to reach.

*Shuster:* Yes. Of course, you have to begin by stating that there

was already a good deal of anti-Semitism in central Europe, due primarily to the struggle for existence. But with him it became something quite new. I think it can only be understood if you see what it meant at the time, right after World War I, when he began to operate in Bavaria. German nationalism, traditionally, had been opposed to every vestige of what you might call Judeo-Christian doctrine. It believed in survival of the fittest, it detested a faith which said that you could achieve happiness through humility. Jews happened to be unpopular at that time because they had been participants in the little revolution of Eisner and Toller, which was an effort—purely ideological, purely idealistic—to build a new society on the ruins of war. And so he had this asset to begin with: he already has an audience when he talked anti-Semitism. That's why he concentrated on it and made the Jews responsible for everything, including all the things of which the Catholic Church might possibly be accused.

*Larrabee:* And he already had planned his program on the idea that you must have a single enemy; he would have gone looking for an enemy, whatever happened.

*Bryson:* He had to have an enemy, and he picked the Jews.

*Shuster:* That's what he did—although, perhaps, he had already begun to pick up anti-Semitism in Vienna in the days when he was kicking around the cafes.

*Bryson:* But does that explain the savagery of the anti-Semitism as it came out—the concentration camps, the murders of thousands of Jews, and so on?

*Larrabee:* Well, once Hitler had decided on something, he always went whole hog. That was his complaint about the other parties: they didn't have this totality of purpose.

*Bryson:* He didn't mind murder?

*Larrabee:* He didn't mind anything if it contributed to the final decisiveness of his own leadership. What he had against all of them—the pan-German parties or the Social Democrats—was that as soon as they got into Parliament they began to temporize and to stop short and to accept compromise solutions. He wanted people who went absolutely to the end.

*Shuster:* One thing we should add is that a great deal of this psychosis results from the German defeat in 1918.

*Bryson:* Do you mean his own psychosis or what he found around him to use?

*Shuster:* What he found around him to use. It was the feeling that four years of strenuous fighting had led to nothing save defeat, and that this defeat could be blamed on those Germans who had sabotaged the army. You see, this delusion plays a great role in the developments of that time. I'm sure that Hitler believed every word that he wrote about it. He thought it was impossible for the German army to be defeated—therefore, it must have been stabbed in the back.

*Larrabee:* And he says himself that he had wept rarely in his life, but when he was in the hospital, in Pomerania, and the news came that the armistice had been signed, he had flung himself on his bunk and sobbed. This must have been a very important moment in his life.

*Bryson:* You said a minute ago, Mr. Shuster, that Hitler blamed



on the Jews things that might have been blamed on the Catholics. I suppose he could have blamed things on *any* religious group or institution in Germany at that time, but did Hitler have the same hatred of the Catholics that he had of the Jews?

*Shuster*: I think we can say this with relative certainty: in the pre-war stage, or even in the pre-Stalingrad stage, people were persecuted but they weren't actually sent to places like Belsen; that was a later plan, a later development. We also know that during the war a plan for the destruction of the Catholic Church in Germany was very carefully worked out by the Nazis, to be put into effect in that moment which they still believed was coming—the moment of complete decisive victory.

*Larrabee*: And don't you get the feeling in the early part of the book, where he is explaining how the pan-Germans went wrong in their anti-Catholicism, that he is trying to say, in effect: "I, too, would believe this if I thought it expedient, but I don't; we've got to remember that the South Germans must be accommodated"?

*Shuster*: Precisely.

*Larrabee*: He says that the leader must regard as sacrosanct the prejudices of the people that he's trying to lead.

*Bryson*: But here you are describing a man with paranoic energy—if you'll permit me to use that word—great gifts of a specialized kind, and a statesmanlike grasp of how you can use large ideas with large groups of people (which I suppose is one of the marks of the true statesman). He has all this and yet he fails. Now where did his plan go wrong? Why didn't Hitler conquer the world?

*Shuster*: For my part, I would say that he attacked a world which he couldn't possibly have conquered.

*Bryson*: Nobody could have conquered it?

*Shuster*: Nobody. He couldn't conquer it on the basis of conviction, nor on principle, nor even on the basis of solid might. We live in a comparable period, when the ideas incarnate in this book have been to a large extent taken over by the Russians. And here again you have evidence that you can, at least for a while, suppress people by force, but you cannot suppress them in terms of belief and principle.

*Larrabee*: This may be trying to psychoanalyze him with too blunt an instrument, but isn't it also possible that this demonic energy of his was self-destructive? Certainly, when everything came down about his head in that great *Götterdämmerung*, it seemed emotionally consistent with what he had done so far. The Hitler in the bunker, storming at the German people for being unworthy of him, is the same Hitler as the one who insisted at the beginning that you must either be a hammer or an anvil and that you must wager everything on the turn of battle.

*Shuster*: I'm glad you mentioned *Götterdämmerung*, because that is the motif of the whole thing; it's the idea that it's much better to die and to lose than to be subservient, to be second-rate, to be in any sense of the term not a "world power."

*Larrabee*: The remark that I think is attributed to Goering—that "if the time comes when we must leave the stage of history, we will slam the door so hard it will be heard down the ages"—is a very typical Nazi frame of mind.

*Bryson:* But I think one has to be very careful not to fall into Hitler's own version of what he was talking about. You can talk all you like about the pure and noble Hitler youth, you can talk about his super-nationalism and everything else. But we don't forget—do we?—that these same blond demigods committed acts of unspeakable cruelty; that along with the ideas of purity came ideas of intolerable, inhuman behavior; that his nationalism was completely selfish and had no humanity in it at all. Now what always puzzles me is this: did this man really believe that you could make a great nation of people who had one set of morality for themselves and, at the same time, behaved the way they did toward other people that they thought were inferior?

*Larrabee:* I think he believed it.

*Shuster:* Let's not forget that one of the basic principles of the Hitler Youth movement was that the production of healthy children, out of wedlock, by these young people, was a great asset to the nation. You can see that this is a many-sided monster.

*Larrabee:* And in the passages of *Mein Kampf* where he is praising early marriage he almost seems to be saying that; he doesn't quite come out and say it, but it's implicit that he meant that it should be tolerated.

*Shuster:* In the area around Berchtesgaden he actually fostered, personally, the begetting of illegitimate children by members of the SS, so that Berchtesgaden would be populated, in his opinion, with a much stronger race than it natively had.

*Bryson:* This is a rejection of all morality in the conventional sense. But wouldn't he have said, in more or less pseudo-Nietzschean terms, this is a higher morality?

*Shuster:* He did say it.

*Bryson:* And he believed it?

*Shuster:* He believed in what he calls the humanness of nature, which is a kind of watered-down Darwinian idea that the people who triumph in this circumstance were intended by nature to triumph. This is what seems so utterly and maddeningly consistent about the man's mind. It's why I feel that implicit in the book is all of the terror that came after.

*Bryson:* If you have a philosophy of history, don't you have to make a quick judgment as to whether this man failed because of mistakes like misjudging the British and the Russians and the Americans, or failed because what he was trying to do couldn't succeed?

*Shuster:* I think he *had* to fail, that is my fundamental conviction. And even in the days when it looked as though nothing could bar his success, he personally felt so strongly that the end would be tragedy, from the German point of view (overlooking the tragedies he imposed on other people), that I never had any doubt as to the outcome.

*Bryson:* He rushed toward tragedy and brought the world down with him.

# SENECA

## Letters to Helvia and Polybius

(As broadcast November 18, 1956)

MASON GROSS

• MOSES HADAS

• LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Seneca did a considerable part of his voluminous writing in the conditions of exile. One might say, therefore, that Seneca was a man who spent a good deal of his time telling other people how to behave when he was not too successfully managing his own life. Maybe that's standard; maybe most people who write moral letters to other people somehow mismanage their own lives.

*Hadas:* I don't know that I would write him off as a failure. Of course, he was compelled to take his own life. But I would say that this was a useful career; certainly he was one of the Roman authors who were most influential in subsequent years. I think it is quite obvious, for example, that Elizabethan tragedy would not be what it is if there hadn't been a Seneca; Montaigne wouldn't have written his essays without Seneca; and there are some people who even claim that the French Revolution wouldn't have taken place without the Stoicism that Seneca propagated. Much English prose style, particularly in the seventeenth century, was consciously Senecan. If a man's footprints on the sands of time mean anything, this man has left many and very deep footprints.

*Bryson:* But I was only, perhaps a bit too cynically, calling attention to the fact that he was always giving wise advice, and that he was generally giving it at a time when he himself had got into trouble. I wasn't trying to judge the man.

*Gross:* I think that you're right in line with the usual criticism of Seneca from his own time down to the present day. Perhaps we don't know the whole story about his life and how he actually lived it, but even in his own writings you find extraordinary discrepancies between his philosophy, and what he apparently felt it necessary to do in order to get along. For example, in one of his letters that we're talking about today, we have the most extravagant praise of the Emperor Claudius who had exiled him.

*Bryson:* With good reason, Mr. Gross.

*Gross:* I don't think the reasons given are reasonable. He's in exile, and he's praising Claudius through this device of a letter to one of Claudius's right-hand men. Then, the minute Claudius is dead, he comes out with the most disreputable attack on him. It is simply loathsome, this attack on Claudius. We know that Seneca apparently was a very wealthy man, yet all the way through he sings the praises of poverty. And all the way through he's talking about accepting one's fate. *He* was doing anything but accepting his fate! He was fighting bitterly against it. He was ambitious. This discrepancy between the Stoic philosophy which he's preaching—apparently, as you suggest, for other people—and his own character, as revealed in his writings,

has caused him to be criticized from, well, the Emperor Nero himself right down to the present day.

*Hadas*: I think that this is all relative. Mr. Gross apparently longs for the perfectionism of the original Stoa, where any miscarriage at all is fatal, where there are no degrees of guilt, where a miss is as good as a mile. You drown as dead in three inches of water as in three fathoms. The original Stoa was absolutely revolutionary. But here is a man, working within a system which is there to stay—

*Bryson*: And working several hundred years later—

*Hadas*: Several hundred years later. The best that he can achieve is a kind of amelioration. As for his own character—well, in the first place, we don't look at any virtuoso performer's private character. If he fiddles well, he can be as stingy or as miserly or as greedy as he pleases.

*Gross*: Just a minute, Mr. Hadas! When the virtuoso is a virtuoso in moral philosophy, then I think we have the right to expect some kind of relationship between his ideas and his actions.

*Bryson*: Well, this would apply to Nero, too: how much worse might he have been without Seneca?

*Hadas*: The best that Seneca can do is to ameliorate—to remind people of certain values, certain loyalties outside themselves. And this was not a time for revolution. If he had gone any further, as some of his colleagues did, he would have landed in jail or been executed.

*Bryson*: He put it off quite a while.

*Hadas*: He put it off a great while. And I think he did some good things.

*Bryson*: And, of course, this was the time when the corruption of the Roman Empire was almost its worst, with Nero, Tiberius, and so on.

*Hadas*: Well, it's hard to put your finger on precisely the point where one particular kind of rottenness replaces another. But one of the things that Seneca repeatedly says, both in his plays and in his writings, is this: that the king, the Emperor, should regard himself as a servant of the people in the Stoic sense rather than as an oriental monarch who owns the people.

*Gross*: But he taught Nero, Mr. Hadas, and taught him for five years!

*Hadas*: And constantly tried to impress this upon him, both in his plays and in his essays. If he failed, well, he made the effort and the effort needed to be made. Tiberius, for example, had been the first to insist on his own divinity, so that it would have been natural for Nero to continue to do that. But he never did actually regard himself as a god—partly, I should hope, because of Seneca's teachings.

*Gross*: As three teachers sitting here, we've got to be careful not to assume the responsibility for all our disciples or all our pupils.

*Bryson*: I know, but we always do that.

*Gross*: If Socrates wants to talk to me about the virtues of poverty or the virtues of humility or the hope for immortality or something of that sort, Socrates can talk to me. His life is a complete exemplification of his beliefs. Now I do feel that under those emperors, if you are a person of tremendous ability and tremendous energy and

tremendous go, such as Seneca must have been, you're going to have a terrifically difficult time trying to spread the general philosophy of Stoicism. The times are completely out of joint, at least from the point of view of spreading it on any influential level. You can go and preach to slaves, if you like, and you'll pick up an Epictetus here and there. But if you're Nero's tutor, if you're amongst the great and influential in Rome, how do you behave? It's a very difficult thing.

*Hadas*: Of course the case against Seneca is a formidable one and you can draw up a terrible indictment, but Stoicism was responsible for all of the good things in the Roman empire. I would insist upon that. You had, after all, equality before the law; you had eventually, though not in Seneca's own time, universal citizenship. These are points which the Stoics developed, propagated, urged. You have in Seneca's own writings magnificent things about slavery. Now he couldn't, of course, abolish that institution, but he insisted that slaves are men like ourselves by nature and that they should be respected as such. I think that if we went back to the beginnings of Stoicism as an institution and looked at it very briefly, as well as at its rivals, we would have a higher respect for Seneca himself.

*Bryson*: But sticking just for a moment to the man himself, the question I would like to ask is this: was he urging Stoic doctrines because, being ambitious and immensely able, as Mr. Gross says, he thought that there was a career in teaching something that was fashionable, even though not lived up to? As I might choose—I never have—but as I might choose to teach democracy not because I believed in it, but because I thought that by preaching good sermons on democracy I'd get ahead? Now, is that unfair to Seneca?

*Hadas*: Well, it might not be unfair in the early part of his career when he was, as the expression is, on the make. But the best part of his writing is the *Letters to Lucilius*, which he wrote when there was no external pressure on him whatever to do so.

*Bryson*: He really was under the shadow of death.

*Hadas*: He was under the shadow of death and he wrote those letters, it seems to me, from the purest of motives. He thinks that they're going to do some good. He may have been naïve in thinking so, but there have been a lot of naïve teachers in the world. And I think that writing these things under the shadow of death is a gallant kind of gesture and justifies the man.

*Gross*: I think that's true. And I doubt very much that Stoicism was fashionable with the ruling class. It would have been very hard to make a Claudius or a Caligula into a Stoic. I don't think you're going to win the influential friends, let's say, by preaching Stoicism.

*Bryson*: I think you ought to be careful, Mr. Gross, or you'll be saying something on Seneca's side!

*Gross*: Oh, I've never tried to be *against* Seneca. But I think you have to face the facts about the man; you pick up his book and the difficulties are there right away. When he writes to Polybius and consoles with him on the death of his brother, you don't think Seneca cares a bit about his brother. This is all a bit of machinery for doing something else, and there's a kind of a falseness in it that you have to recognize. I agree with Mr. Hadas that the *Letters to Lucilius* are

much more genuine than these earlier letters from exile.

*Hadas:* But, you see, we're faced with this: we're looking for a closet philosophy here that is absolutely pure, or for a saint like Socrates. We haven't got that. We've got a man working in politics and trying to do the best he can, under certain considerations and certain pressures which are very hard indeed. And the gauge ought to be a different one. Very great people have slipped occasionally. This man's in exile, he wants to get back—presumably he thinks he can do some good. The way to get back is with this time-saving adulation. Why not, if this is going to bring good?

*Bryson:* You're addressing this "why not?" to Mr. Gross?

*Hadas:* Yes. This is to Mr. Gross.

*Gross:* I think the question answers itself: I think the person who uses time-saving adulation for this kind of purpose gets what he deserves. And I think *he* falls short because he deserts the basic principles of his own philosophy.

*Hadas:* Well, I think that you're really applying the gauge of true Stoicism, of perfectionism. None of us, I suppose, is a very practical man, but we all know this much: that you cannot follow the precepts of Zeno, of the first generation of Stoics, and get anywhere any more. You might have—when the world was in Zeno's stage, when he had this bright hope of complete revolution and of seeing the whole world unified. But the Stoics found out very soon that the revolutionary tactic was no good. They started to work through institutions as they were, advising kings, advising Agis and Cleomenes in Sparta, advising the Gracchi in Rome. They were responsible for a great deal that was good. They persuaded themselves that the Roman Empire as it had been founded was a pretty close pattern of their own city of God, the universal state, with the Emperor designed by Providence to guide it—not to own it, but to guide it; he is no more important as an individual than the meanest of his subjects. Here is an institution that is here to stay: it is inconceivable that anyone should have enough imagination even to dream of its ending. Now what do you do? Do you bring up your perfectionism again and say "I'll have the whole loaf or no bread at all," or do you try to bend a little here, to improve the tone a bit there, to remind people of their responsibility to themselves, to assert their human dignity, and to do a lot of good things? This is not a saint, this is not a closet philosopher; this is a man in politics who most extraordinarily interests himself in philosophy and in writing.

*Bryson:* It seems to me, Mr. Hadas, that you raise another point here. It's rather bewildering to face the fact that a book which I think you'd be inclined to say is *not* a great book had, as you said yourself, a tremendous influence. That's quite as interesting a puzzle as the contrast between the man's character and his professions. How did Seneca's writings come to be one of the two or three most important books of the Middle Ages?

*Hadas:* It's not a first-rate book, I will agree. But there's an accidental reason for its vogue during the Middle Ages, as there was in the case of Virgil. Virgil in his Fourth Eclogue had foretold the birth of a child who would bring salvation to the world. It was always

believed that he was prophesying the birth of Christ, and that gave him a sort of status as a near-saint. In the case of Seneca, we have a body of correspondence allegedly between him and St. Paul—after all, Gallio, who appears in *The Acts* as proconsul of Achaia, was Seneca's own brother—and these letters were believed genuine until the present century. Because people thought he had been in correspondence with St. Paul, the Latin Fathers leaned very heavily on his side. They refer to him as "our Seneca," and that gave him a head start. As to why a book that we today regard as poor should exercise this great influence, it may be that all that it had to say has been assimilated into our civilization and so we don't need it any more, or we don't need it quite so much.

*Gross*: Well, I think Seneca is still usable in the same way that Montaigne used him. I think our troubles are perhaps in trying to read too much of him at one sitting. He is an exquisite phrase-maker, and if you want somebody to summarise a moral point in a neat sentence which you can remember, which you can put at the head of a chapter when you're writing your own essays, there's nobody like Seneca for it. You've got to give him credit for being a person who really could take this tough Latin language and carve some pretty good sentences out of it.

*Hadas*: And that, if you'll excuse me, is another reason for his lack of vogue. This age of ours is as suspicious of rhetoric as it could possibly be. We speak of purple passages with contempt, and we suspect any author who tries to make quotable phrases and things of that kind. But that's not really so despicable a performance. After all, the word is important and it is the basis of our civilization. And here's an artist in words—perhaps a bad artist, perhaps not the kind of artist that we should like today, but certainly a conscious artist in words.

*Gross*: I think he really is a bad artist.

*Bryson*: You're not going that far, are you, Mr. Gross?

*Gross*: Well, no. This is rhetoric. After all, his father was a rhetor and a teacher of oratory and so on. And in the days of the Roman Empire, if you were going to be an orator, you couldn't do as Cicero did and go into the Senate and make long speeches. You took to your writing, you took to something fairly innocuous, let's say, that wouldn't rouse the imperial hostility and you wrote letters or speeches, or whatever it might be, of this sort. Seneca's prose doesn't hang together. In other words, this is a series of sentences, by and large. Our mistake is to think that he's writing a continuous moral treatise.

*Hadas*: I hate always to be apologizing for my little hero—well, he's not really my hero—but this is a condition of publication in his day. As you say, people could not any longer participate directly and effectively in guiding public affairs in the large way, in the Senate or in public speeches. And so they wrote what they could, mere belles-lettres, if you like.

*Bryson*: How did they publish it?

*Hadas*: They published it by recitation. You would hold a soiree or set up a salon or something, and you would read your own stuff. The point was to get as many rounds of applause as possible, and you

got applause by these little verbal jewels. As a matter of fact, in Seneca's tragedies, where you find this kind of dialogue going on for pages, they're not really talking, they're just batting apothegms back and forth. You get the feeling of watching a ping pong game. Your head is constantly oscillating from one side to the other to see the next jewel come out. Now I speak of it, perhaps, in a pejorative way, but there are good things here. I think Mr. Gross's point should be emphasized: this is the only avenue that a man had any more. He couldn't get up and say revolutionary things. Lucretius was really the last man who could do that. And it was inconceivable at a time when you had actual censorship, when books were burnt if they were not in keeping with the official line.

*Bryson:* And when they put the authors on top of the books, if that seemed to be more emphatic.

*Gross:* Of course, I think there's another reason—to go back to your earlier question, Mr. Bryson—as to why he retains this influence. I think it's partly because he does say things in such a way that you can remember them. But also it's *what* he says. In other words, here you have the Stoic morality distilled in these very choice phrases—very easy to lay hold of, very easy to, oh, embroider on pillows or frame and put over the fireplace. They are a kind of morality that speaks to everybody. This is the popular side, if you like, of Stoicism. It's good sound stuff and the only quarrel that I have at all, or least that his critics have had with Seneca, is that his own life didn't exemplify those morals. But it is a sound, practical morality. This code of behavior is one that has appealed to everybody in our western civilization, certainly from Socrates to the present day. It's got the ring of an authentic, practical philosophy for tough times.

*Bryson:* In other words, it's not a philosophy that would lead a man to pretend virtue without having it?

*Gross:* No, no—these are the sound elements of a sensible code of behavior.

*Hadas:* With a little more than the preacher normally has. The *Letters to Lucilius* are little lay sermons, mid-week sermons, and very good as such.

*Bryson:* He was the first Rotary Club speaker.

*Hadas:* Yes, an effective preacher to deliver a talk at lunch. But the point that I would like to make is that you've got something more here. You've got a kind of philosophic rationale; you are insisting that man's job is to live in accordance with nature—not in the sense of the simple life, baked potatoes and a glass of milk, but that you have the dignity of being part of nature. He would have said, as Spinoza said, "God or nature, all is one." This gives a man great dignity, no matter what his position in society may be. You see, the world was getting so overwhelmingly big and men were getting so tiny, ever since Alexander the Great, that it was necessary for a man to assert himself in some form or other.

*Bryson:* You can bring it right down to today!

*Hadas:* Well, you try to redress this great imbalance between an overwhelmingly colossal world and a tiny little man, and it seems to me that there are only two ways to do it. One would be the Epicurean



way, which is to dismiss the world completely and say that you're an island all to yourself and that you will behave by a gauge of pleasure—you define pleasure by absence of pain—and away with the world. The other is to make yourself more important by calling yourself in so many words a part of God, and taking great responsibilities for the way the world is running.

*Gross*: Mr. Hadas is a very persuasive speaker. I'm almost persuaded that this is what Seneca believed and wrote. But you *know* he didn't, did he really? I mean when you go back to these letters—and now I pick up perhaps the unhappiest ones, the letters to Helvia, his mother, and the letters to Polybius. This is Seneca wanting to get back onto the stage in Rome where he could be a big shot.

*Bryson*: He might have wanted to use his power for good if he got it. That doesn't mitigate the crime?

*Gross*: Well, now you want him to be an Epicurean. Nature has put him in the world to do a certain job; he wants to find a way he can do it. This is perfectly beautiful and holds up splendidly until you go and read those letters again. But here is a man who is in exile, he doesn't like it one little bit, he writes a perfectly horrible letter to one of the chief stooges for the emperor, flattering this emperor, doing everything to get himself back because it's important that he should be back and be a big shot in Rome again. Now this is not the individual divorcing himself from the ambitions of the world and reconciling himself to nature, nature even in the fuller sense of the word. This is a man who was politically ambitious in the artificial sense of that time. I'm not asking him to be an Epicurean; that's an entirely different world.

*Hadas*: But I would still say that you're being too good a Stoic for Seneca and you're still looking for a kind of perfectionism. I'll grant you that there's a measure of hypocrisy here. Hypocrisy is the tribute which vice pays to virtue, but hypocrisy is necessary in this world—I think in Seneca's world, anyhow.

*Gross*: And I'm sure he must have a nice little quotation saying so.

*Bryson*: In reacquainting myself with Seneca—I don't live in the Roman world as Mr. Hadas does—I read instead the *Letters to Lucilius* where he, as Mr. Hadas said a while ago, had nothing to gain by being moral. He seems really to have wanted to help the world by writing these lay sermons, and although they have a slightly tinny effect sometimes, there's quite a lot in them that one has to say is terrific.

*Gross*: Oh, I think this is true, as I said before.

*Hadas*: These are to remind his audience, periodically, that there are other values in the world, that you cultivate your soul, that you do this or that, that there have been people in the world who have suffered great discomfort for the sake of an ideal. These are good things to remind us about.

*Gross*: Oh, I think if the fact that poverty is not as bad as it's made out is said often enough, particularly by a man who's a multi-millionaire, there must be some kind of punch behind it. But I think our only mistake is trying to make too much of this man. I think if

we take him exactly as he is—a man who understands the Stoic principles, a man who can write them well and persuasively, a man who has a certain ring of conviction behind him when he's thinking in terms of ideas—and divorce ourselves from him as a person, then perhaps we can get a little further with him. But let's not make him over into a great hero.

*Hadas*: I think we're both polarizing ourselves. I think that if you'd taken me unawares, I would not perhaps have spoken in such laudatory terms of Seneca. I'm perfectly aware of his weaknesses.

*Bryson*: I think that maybe I'm a more shameless teacher than either one of you, because I have a feeling that if you could once convince the young—or those in power, even—that the old saws really have some truth in them, some day it might have a good effect.

## O. HENRY

### *Cabbages and Kings*

(*As broadcast November 25, 1956*)

F. FRASER BOND   •   VIRGILIA PETERSON   •   LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: So many of the books that we have been discussing in this series were written by people who were exiled or imprisoned for their political beliefs; they were often revolutionaries, or else great spirits who moved too fast for the world of their time. But O. Henry was just convicted of a crime.

*Bond*: Yes, he was convicted of embezzlement. It's doubtful still whether he was guilty, but anyway he was convicted and sent from Texas to the Ohio State Penitentiary. He was unhappy there, he was sensitive about it. And although the term was five years, he was let out in three and a half years for good behavior.

*Bryson*: Had he ever written before?

*Bond*: Yes, he had. He had written newspaper sketches for a little fly-by-night paper which he had started himself in Austin. But his chief journalistic talent up to then was cartooning and sketching. He had sketched a great deal, during his boyhood and early youth, and he sold some of his sketches.

*Bryson*: He really was good enough to sell. A good many writers have been artists too, but most of them have been rather bad ones.

*Peterson*: I think you can tell that in his work. But *Cabbages and Kings* was written about Honduras—I suppose because by the time he got into the penitentiary his most recent memory was of having fled to Honduras after the charge of embezzlement.

*Bryson*: You say, Mr. Bond, that there's some doubt about his crime. But we're not interested in O. Henry's, or William Sydney Porter's, morals; we're interested in his artistic achievement. Do you

suppose the shock of his actual conviction and imprisonment had a great effect upon him? He'd been something of a dilettante, hadn't he? He had done a few cartoons, he'd written a few sketches—

*Bond*: And drifted around, living here and living there.

*Bryson*: You told me once out of your knowledge of his life that he had strummed a guitar and sung cowboy songs.

*Bond*: Oh yes, indeed. He was on a ranch in Texas and he admired the cowboys very much.

*Bryson*: The first Gene Autry.

*Bond*: As well as the first of a lot of other things.

*Peterson*: I'd like to get back to your rather brash statement that we're not concerned with his morals. I think his whole concept of morality, if one can detect any such things in these stories, is affected by his private life. He seems to be very much concerned with a certain kind of dishonesty—

*Bryson*: Miss Peterson, I'm *always* interested in a writer's morals so far as they affect his writing, but I don't care for a moment whether he was guilty or not. What I want to know is whether or not literature came out of the fact that he went to jail. And you say it did.

*Peterson*: I didn't say *literature*, I didn't exaggerate that much. But graft and embezzlement certainly hang over him. He has a whole group of stories called *The Gentle Gaffer*. And the stories in *Cabbages and Kings* are entirely based on two different removals from respectable places of a hundred thousand dollars by people in high office.

*Bryson*: This loose framework in which he put a lot of his short stories has fascinated me as typical of O. Henry's work. This book is no novel, even though it's of novel length. As a matter of fact, it's a short story of what I would dare to call a typical O. Henry kind, stretched out, with padding, to novel length. What particularly makes it typical is the fact that there is a snap in the last three or four pages which is absolutely unexpected. And though I've read the thing several times, I always forget that particular trick ending—it always surprises me.

*Peterson*: There's a snap, but you're not saying that that makes it a novel?

*Bryson*: No, I'm saying it *isn't* a novel. I'm saying that it's like his short stories. Now what is it that enables one to say with some safety that this is a typical O. Henry story? What *is* a typical O. Henry story?

*Bond*: I think it's what we've come to call the "formula" story. He starts with an extremely diverting opening line, a sentence or two that more or less lassos the interest of the reader, and works up to what some might call a contrived ending, but is better called a surprise ending, I suppose. In most cases it seems to develop logically out of the situation and out of the characters, although it's a surprise to us. And he uses slang for color.

*Peterson*: He certainly uses slang, as you justly say. My opinion of him is that he escapes into the vernacular because it avoids the necessity of writing really well. He loves a dialect, a brogue, bad grammar. Well, it seems to me that a great many writers—Ring

Lardner, Damon Runyon, those people—all seem to do the same thing. And I always feel that they're dodging the responsibility, really.

*Bryson:* Maybe they are, but it's a new idea to me. After all, if you're going to depict a city, as Damon Runyon and Ring Lardner and O. Henry all did, wouldn't the vernacular of the city be part of your machinery for doing it?

*Peterson:* Yes, but hardly anybody in O. Henry speaks good English, and if it is good English, it's a very quaint and dated concept of it. For instance, when O. Henry wants to explain that a man saw something, he says "his senses were cognizant of the palm trees and the coughing alligators and the black estuary" or something like that.

*Bryson:* That's simply old-fashioned irony, isn't it?

*Peterson:* It's a kind of pomposity.

*Bryson:* But an intentional pomposity. He was sort of waving a little flag there and saying Look, I'm being funny.

*Peterson:* But I wonder whether he just wasn't afraid of putting it straight because he wouldn't put it well enough?

*Bond:* No, I don't think so. I think it is the journalistic knack of quick description and quick quote. After all, most of his stories were written when he was a newspaperman. But I'm getting away from *Cabbages and Kings*. I wanted to say that he sold stories while he was in prison, and the reason he sold was to send money to his daughter Margaret—

*Bryson:* Who didn't know he was in prison.

*Bond:* No, he kept it from her. I suppose it wasn't kept from her always, but it was certainly kept from her during the time he was in prison. He was terribly ashamed of it. But after the first year or so he was not uncomfortable there. He had as a boy worked in a drugstore, and in the prison they gave him a job as a kind of a pharmacist's mate. He slept in a room by himself, not in a cell—it was up there in the prison hospital—and he had plenty of time to write and plenty of light and air.

*Bryson:* You know, Mr. Bond, the further we go with these discussions of books by people who've been in exile and prison, the more I regret that I never got sent to jail and never got kicked out of the country. Of course, some of these imprisonments may have ended in sudden death, but that's something one has to take into account anyway. And nearly all of the people who have written great books or even not-so-great books in prison were well-treated, had plenty of time, slept well, ate well—and all the world was fended away from them so that they could become writers. Maybe it was lucky that he got sent to jail.

*Peterson:* Well, there's no other place where you can eschew responsibility with such a whole heart and a relaxed nervous system.

*Bryson:* Except a hospital.

*Peterson:* In a hospital you're constantly being bothered with pills and injections and things. I think a prison must be the perfect place to write. But what I'm worrying about is whether we're ever going to talk about *Cabbages and Kings*.

*Bryson:* Let's get back to it. There seems to be something elusive about this book.

*Peterson*: There certainly is.

*Bryson*: Does it interest you, aside from the fact that it is his first book? Does it seem to you in some way an epitome of O. Henry?

*Peterson*: I don't think the rest of his stories, written at later date, reach any further in depth. He seems to have a very short breath. Perhaps the longest breath he had was in *Cabbages and Kings*; although each component part is short, they do overlap and form a whole, which can't be said of anything else he ever wrote.

*Bryson*: They form a whole in atmosphere and, of course, the characters are intertwined, so that you follow the same set of raffish ne'er-do-wells through the banana-republic politics and skullduggery. But you said, Mr. Bond, that O'Henry turned away from this and became in some fashion a typical New York reporter.

*Bond*: Yes, he came to New York and found the city stimulating. In one of his letters, for instance, he's talking about writing and he says: "Out into the streets! Go out into the streets, the stimulant for the story-writer." Well, a great many people find the big city stimulating. With the sense of activity and work in the air, it's much easier to write there than where every prospect pleases.

*Bryson*: He stayed in the city; he didn't go to Connecticut to do it.

*Peterson*: Was he the first to write about shopgirls and washer-women, about the lower middle class, in our country?

*Bond*: I don't think he was the first. Stephen Crane, a few years before him, had written *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*—remember? No, O. Henry was not the first. But he made a specialty of people who were in difficulty and those who were under a delusion.

*Bryson*: Now, wait a minute—this is a very curious combination: people who were in difficulty and those under a delusion. Can you explain that?

*Peterson*: Well, isn't that just practically everybody?

*Bond*: Sometimes we're given a choice between being in difficulty and being under a delusion. Some people are under the delusion they're *not* in difficulty. But O. Henry is a bit of a legend to newspaper people. When I was a young newspaper writer here in New York—say in 1919 or 1920—there was the legend that if, like O. Henry, you sat in Madison Square long enough, a story would come to you. Well, I was young enough to try it out. Only crackpots came to me. They may have been in difficulty, they certainly were under delusions. But today's young journalist just thinks of O. Henry as a name.

*Bryson*: But don't you have to find out why that's so? After all, this man did have a great appeal at one time; he was an innovator of considerable importance. Now, why has he lost his glamour?

*Peterson*: Isn't it partly because of his sentimentality? Aren't we fed up with corny pathos now? In a world that is rather tragic and grim, haven't we decided that a deeper level of understanding is necessary to give us the feeling of having had an experience when we've read a story?

*Bryson*: Ask that question of Mr. Bond!

*Bond*: Yes, it may be. But I think the basic reason is that the O. Henry formula was imitated so badly by so many writers that it

has lost its appeal. You see, he really started the fashion for these schools of story writing, these short-courses in short stories. They were able to analyze his tricks and teach them to their students, but they couldn't imbue them with his talent.

*Peterson*: But you can still write a formula story and if it has depth, perception, and understanding, it will remain a memorable experience to the reader. I would like to maintain, though I don't think it's particularly fair, that you get none of that feeling from any of O. Henry's stories, not even the most famous ones.

*Bryson*: I'm not sure that I can dismiss him quite that easily. I reread *Cabbages and Kings*. I'd almost wholly forgotten it and although it's what you say—fairly superficial, even a bit smart-alecky, to use a phrase of his own time—I enjoyed it. There was something about it that held my interest again and gave me a certain kind of pleasure. Now, what is that? It's not that I'm particularly interested in the fate of scalawags, or even of pure and holy heroines, in the banana republics.

*Peterson*: I suppose it's wit. I suppose also that we're just constitutional readers and that as long as our eyes can follow the print we're perfectly happy. I would never stop an O. Henry story once I'd started it. I would certainly finish it, and I would certainly like to know how he ends it. But it seems to vanish like so much snow in the hot sun after one has read it. It doesn't seem to hold. And I do like an experience. Compare this type with the *New Yorker* story, for instance, which is also an anecdotal kind of story, also often superficial, and certainly just a slice, a tiny slice, of life. But it's written in depth and with a kind of savageness, perhaps, or even a certain philosophy—at any rate, something that you carry away with you. You never forget the best of the *New Yorker* stories the way you forget the best of O. Henry's.

*Bond*: I think the *New Yorker* type of short story is having just as great an effect on present-day short story writers as O. Henry had in his particular time.

*Bryson*: What's the key word there? Is it savagery?

*Bond*: No. The *New Yorker* short story seems to be a single revelation of an emotional situation, with very interesting dialogue, that quickly characterizes the people. In a way, O. Henry did that. The setting is important. It has to be interesting enough to give the people something to do while the conversation goes on. But the peculiar thing about so many of the *New Yorker* short stories is that they seem to be an interesting conversation about a state of affairs previously existing.

*Peterson*: Yes, I think that's a very good observation. But I wonder if perhaps it's because our civilization has changed so much, just as the face of New York has changed. Just as there are no longer the same restaurants on West 23rd Street nor the same local scenes that O. Henry described, so the people in the roles he described are different. There used to be a lot of stories about newly-arrived immigrants. We don't have very many of that sort any more. We don't have shopgirls coming in from the country, knowing absolutely nothing about the city and being overwhelmed by a place like Altman's;

we don't have washerwomen—I don't think we do—toiling for sweat-shop wages the way they did then. Take, for instance, that story of *The Trimmed Lamp*, where the girl in the store seems to be a calculating, hard-boiled girl with false values because she's taking on "culture" and imitating the rich lady who comes to the store, while the simple, wholesome girl scrubs people's clothes all day. You expect, of course, that the washergirl will triumph, because she seems so much nicer, but she's the one who goes wrong. Well, I don't think I've ever seen two young women who correspond to those; I think they've simply gone out of date with the clothes they wore.

*Bond*: You know that O. Henry called a collection of his stories, the one that associated him with this town, *The Four Million*. It was a deliberate reaction to that phrase, the Four Hundred. I think the *New Yorker* type of short story is getting back to the talented and the successful and the rich, to a very limited segment of New York; it doesn't often deal with the great mass of people in this town—and there must be a lot of them—who are not talented, famous, or rich.

*Peterson*: Well, I have no objection, heaven knows—let me get on the record—to a story that doesn't deal with the rich. I'm not particularly interested in the rich. But I think that if O. Henry had been a great artist, the washerwomen and shopgirls of 1902 would still seem absolutely real and would be people with whom you could identify yourself now. They would not be dated if he were not depending on outward effect—on sketches, on jokes, on coincidence, on juxtaposition of improbable ironies. If he were depending on the truth about the heart, they would last better.

*Bryson*: That's certainly true, Miss Peterson. With any artist of first-rate quality you forget, or maybe you even get a little bored with, those things that are peculiar to the scene. If you read Balzac, for instance, you're not interested in the French *bourgeoisie* of the early nineteenth century, although he loads you with details about what's in their houses and what they wore and what they did moment by moment. I'm agreeing with you on this: the thing that gets you is something that's completely apart from all this, or underneath it; the thing that gives it life is that he's talking about human hearts.

*Peterson*: O. Henry tried to. His heart he wore on his sleeve, and it dripped blood the whole time. There's certainly plenty of pathos and sentimentality but I don't think he struck it; I don't think it was real blood, I think it was pink. But my favorite story, actually, is about a dog rather than about people. It's called *The Memoirs of a Yellow Dog* and it's really quite a funny and moving little story, and the jokes in it are all right too. He says "the only common ground of communication on which men and dogs can get together is in fiction." He makes fun of himself, and yet that dog you remember better than you do all the magnolia-perfumed ladies and the quaint embezzling males.

*Bond*: Well, dogs will run away with any scene. But getting back to this business of sentimentality, don't you think there is tender sentiment, not sentimentality, in *The Whirligig of Life*, which I know you've read?

*Peterson*: Well, yes, I have to agree with you.

*Bond*: Those quaint old people who come in to be divorced—

*Peterson*: And then she realized his lamp wouldn't be lit because he didn't know how to light it himself, and she went back with him after all. That, of course, has a strong pull for anybody our age.

*Bryson*: This is a big quarrel, which I couldn't possibly take on at the moment, but I'm not altogether convinced that the character of the times changes and that the good authors merely reflect the times. I think it's more complicated than that. I think the character of life changes much less than the character of the fiction about life—that the basic things that happen in the world, the amount of tragedy in individual lives, the weight of woe in the world, is just about the same all the time. But sometimes we tend to make light of it and sometimes we tend, as we do now in practically all our fiction, to take it too hard.

*Peterson*: I don't think life *can* be taken too hard.

*Bryson*: We fail to make great literature out of it because we take it in the wrong way—we just groan and suffer. That isn't great literature either.

*Peterson*: When it's out of context, it isn't great literature. But I think the lightness with which this man takes immorality and love and practically everything else is also out of context. That's the trouble with it. You cannot identify yourself with any of his people. It's not because of their social position in the world, it's because their attitude toward life itself is not convincing.

*Bond*: But he makes a very high ethical point in the story called *A Blackjack Bargain*. Did you ever read that?

*Peterson*: Oh, yes, that's a noble ending, but it's too darn noble for me! That was when he put himself in another man's clothes when he knew the other was going to be shot—and got himself shot.

*Bryson*: Miss Peterson, is it part of your—what shall I say?—not too satisfied feeling about O. Henry that you think the technique which he launched wore out too quickly, or do you think there's something wrong with the man's spirit, with his moral and intellectual equipment?

*Peterson*: I think he had very little intellectual equipment, and rather a sketchy moral equipment. He tried in one of his stories—in *Cabbages and Kings*, in fact—to get down to a level on which, of course, the psychoanalysts have got us caught now. He says: "There's a quaint old theory that man may have two souls, a peripheral one which serves ordinarily, and a central one which is stirred only at certain times—but then with activity and vigor. While under the domination of the former, a man will shave, vote, pay taxes, give money to his family, buy subscription books, and comfort himself on the average plan. But let the central soul suddenly become dominant and he may, in the twinkling of an eye, elope or hang himself, or give his funds to the search for a microbe. Then the peripheral soul will return and we have our safe, sane citizen again. It is but the revolt of the ego against order." Well, that's interesting; it's approximately close to the idea of the subconscious and the conscious, but actually it doesn't touch anything fundamental. It's very superficial.

*Bond*: Well, superficial or not, may I get back to the technical



end of O. Henry? Now I really think that he used this sketching of his as a basic underlying skeleton for his writing, and that his quick sketches with the pencil enabled him later on to do quick sketches in words. For instance, in *The Whirligig of Life* he describes a character in these words: "He was a narrow six foot of fallow brown skin and yellow hair." He has that quick, picturing stroke with so many of his characters.

*Bryson*: He has it. Can a person have that, Miss Peterson—I'm worried about our dismissal of this man—can he have that and also have depth? He looks out on the great crowd moving through the streets of New York, he picks out a character, and in a sentence he gives you that character. Can a man have that and also have this other thing which more, shall we say, ponderous writers are likely to have?

*Peterson*: Well, I don't like to say it in front of Mr. Bond, but I think it is essentially a journalist's attitude rather than an artist's.

*Bryson*: I think Mr. Bond, being both, can accept the distinction.

*Bond*: He was essentially a journalist. His stories were bought and published by the *Sunday World*. But what is the distinction between journalism and literature, anyway? I like to say that one is timely and the other timeless.

*Peterson*: That's quite a big distinction.

*Bond*: Well, the journalist writes to express the town he's in; the author writes so often to express himself.

*Bryson*: What leaves Miss Peterson a little dissatisfied with this man is the fact that he is not expressing himself, and she suspects that he didn't have a self to express.

*Peterson*: Well, he's wholly American—this we have to admit—with America's limitations and America's charms and advantages. And he came at a time in America before we had achieved, let us say, cultural sophistication. He came at a time when we were really parochial, and I think you feel his parochialism and his lack of sophistication extraordinarily. But it's interesting to remember that we were like that before we became One World, as we are now supposed to be or would like to be.

*Bryson*: I should say that it is not writing of this kind that shows we were unsophisticated, but the fact that it was so popular when writers of much greater depth and importance were being so woefully neglected.

# CONDORCET

## Progress of the Human Mind

(As broadcast December 2, 1956)

T. R. ADAM • ANDRE MICHALOPOULOS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Condorcet was not exactly in prison when he wrote his *Progress of the Human Mind* nor was he really in exile. He was in worse trouble, in a sense, because hanging over him was almost certain death at the hands of the Terror of the French Revolution.

*Adam:* Was Condorcet not an active politician at the time, subject to all the risks of politicians? He'd taken part in the beginnings of the French Revolution, he'd tried to build a constitution for the French Revolution; he simply stopped short of that final act of violence, the murder of the king. At that point he became a victim of the Revolution, a victim of his own political action.

*Bryson:* As men of ideas often do in revolutions?

*Adam:* Violence is always the end of ideas when they are translated into political acts.

*Michalopoulos:* I'd like to look at this man a little, if we could. He was an aristocrat. He had a very aristocratic name—he had a *lot* of names: Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet. And at the time of the French Revolution he was forty-six years old. He had been educated by the Jesuits—he'd had a very fine classical and religious education. I don't know whether that was the reason for his hating religion and the Jesuits so much later in his life, but his early leanings were towards mathematics.

*Bryson:* More than leanings, weren't they?

*Michalopoulos:* Yes, his performance was excellent. At twenty-two his *Essay on the Integral Calculus* was accepted by the Academy of Sciences, at twenty-six he was elected to the Academy, at thirty he was Secretary of it, and a little later he became perpetual Secretary. He was even elected to the Académie Française, which was a very great honor, of course.

*Adam:* Is it not curious that this man of such an ancient family and of such classical education should have spent his life denouncing the continuity of human history, and treating the whole wonderful past of men as if it weren't worth-while considering?

*Bryson:* Oh, now, wait a minute, Mr. Adam! He thought that the past was worth-while considering—that it led up to the wonderful future.

*Adam:* Well, what *is* the wonderful future that Condorcet foresees?

*Bryson:* That is to be set forth here in ten stages, and we'll go at it stage by stage—after we've taken a bit more of a look at him. The suggestion you made that ideas always end in violence when they get into politics—is that Condorcet's fate? He died in his cell after he'd been thrown into jail; he probably killed himself to keep them

from executing him. Is this just the fate of the Old Bolshevik who starts things and can't finish them?

*Michalopoulos*: I wonder. What is very interesting to me is that you so often find the intellectual and the aristocrat starting a popular revolution. You see that in France many times—Mirabeau, for example. In the case of the American Revolution, which fortunately was not in any way as violent as the French Revolution, you still find an aristocrat like Jefferson.

*Bryson*: And Washington.

*Michalopoulos*: And Washington, yes. These are aristocrats coming out for popular ideas. But I don't think you can make a rule of it. You see, in the case of the Bolsheviks you get the mild men, the intellectuals, starting the revolution in Russia and then losing out to the men of power.

*Bryson*: The reason I asked the question is because of Condorcet's own book—or rather because of this sketch for a book that he hopes someday to write. He thought that ideas were going to make a better world, and my cynical friend here, Mr. Adam, doubts that ideas are ever going to make a better world. Now, Condorcet wrote this book at a time when most men would have given up. He was fleeing for his life, everything that he believed in seemed to have been thrown overboard, and yet he clung to the belief that men were perfectible and thought that ideas were going to perfect them.

*Adam*: A perfectly just rebuke. I consider Condorcet a very gallant man, and I consider his basic idea a very gallant one.

*Bryson*: I love to call you a cynic, Mr. Adam—you're always so nice about it. You enjoy being called a cynic, I think.

*Adam*: My fellow men make it enjoyable being cynical. Condorcet, as I said, in this book sets out his faith that all politics is based on philosophic and scientific ideas. And he died—I think deliberately—when his political ideals failed, when he found that the men in power seized on his ideas and perverted them. I hold that all men become martyrs of their philosophy when they try to put it into practice in politics through the instrument of power. I consider it the temptation of the good man which always leads him to his death.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, I'm not going to take issue with you on that, but I do think that a tragic atmosphere surrounds the book. All through the book he keeps saying "We shall show in the future . . . we shall point up this . . . we shall develop this."

*Bryson*: The book he is *going* to write.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes; this *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, which is a long and involved title, is obviously a draft of a book that he has in mind. But he's trying to get as much as he can into this short book in a condensed manner, and that is why, to a certain extent, it's not very well arranged.

*Bryson*: Oh, it's not. It's not, in one sense, a great book at all, although it's a great landmark, perhaps, in the history of thinking about the possibilities of human advancement. He does believe, doesn't he, in the perfectibility of the human spirit as exemplified in single individuals?

*Adam*: Yes, I think that's his final and absolute belief—that the

human being is indefinitely perfectible and is a separate entity. He does *not* consider people as part of a race or a group or a society as the ancient Greeks did, and here I think is the tragedy that Mr. Michalopoulos points out to us. He rushed into print a *Sketch* of the revelation that was going to convince everyone. It is, in fact, a revelation that can never be written. My point is that he has committed us nowadays to this belief, and we operate in terms of it. But we haven't examined the shaky grounds on which Condorcet and the men of his generation built this belief.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, Condorcet certainly seems to base his belief on the omnipotence of reason. And when you are dealing in terms of reason, as Condorcet forces you to do, you begin wondering: does reason, to a Frenchman, mean the same thing as it does to an Anglo-Saxon?

*Bryson*: A fascinating point, there.

*Michalopoulos*: You see, reason to the French is logic; reason to the American is common sense.

*Adam*: And reason to the Britisher is understanding.

*Bryson*: Well, now, wait a minute! If he had been caught in this crossfire of definitions and national tendencies, I think he would have agreed with Bacon when he said that he would seek knowledge for the purpose of applying it to the solution of human problems. This is the Baconian revolution in philosophy, which Condorcet seems definitely to have accepted. But does he reject common sense on behalf of logic?

*Adam*: I don't think he does. But I can't help feeling—I may be entirely wrong—that you are somewhat caught up in the Condorcet heresy yourself.

*Bryson*: Oh, I'm *steeped* in it!

*Adam*: I'm quite sure that you believe in reason in the way which I can only describe as the complete arrogance of man against the universe.

*Bryson*: But man *is* part of the universe. Shouldn't he choose to be the part that gets better and better all the time?

*Michalopoulos*: But can he choose to be the part that explains the whole universe? Condorcet believes that the whole universe exists and progresses and changes in terms of the operation of the mind and senses of man. The alphabet is an instrument, the calculus is an instrument. The mind, in fact, is an instrument. But I do feel that moral values are not stressed at all in his work.

*Bryson*: Well, I agree with you there.

*Michalopoulos*: They're not stressed at all. And Condorcet has no concern for the human passions, both noble and base, which really affect human action, or for the moral fallibility of man. He thinks that with reason alone everything is going to be perfect. And yet he himself admits that in the Middle Ages everything blacked out after the ancient Greek civilization disappeared, and that we moved into a long period of darkness.

*Bryson*: But he does say that man is capable of moral ideas—is that just lip service? Does he really think logic is the only thing that counts?

*Adam*: Maybe he does.

*Michalopoulos*: I don't know for sure, but it seems to me that he passes over moral issues.

*Adam*: He is based very much on the psychology of John Locke. He believes that man's senses are the only thing from which man obtains material for his logical reasoning. And, to that extent, he believes that the ordinary emotions of man are part of the material which logic will work into a pattern. He's not cold-blooded; he believes that the whole nature of man can be patterned by reason. My complaint is that he makes individual man the center of the whole universe. That I cannot swallow.

*Bryson*: Of course, this is a position in the history of thought which one either accepts or rejects. He doesn't do this quite in a vacuum. As you know, he takes men in stages. First they're united in tribes, and then in the second stage they go on to agriculture. This is a kind of sketch of what the anthropologists were going to flesh out later—except that today the anthropologists, I think, have completely rejected the idea that man necessarily makes the same moves from stage to stage. They don't all go through the same stages. Condorcet's next stage is the invention of the alphabet. And then we come to the fourth stage, the progress of the human mind in Greece up to the division of the sciences. There he begins to get into something really exciting and interesting.

*Adam*: Could we stop for a moment at Condorcet's fascinating fourth stage? Because here, I think, we touch on some matters that really make him important today. I don't care what happened to Condorcet in his own day, but he represents our belief in human progress, and a great part of that belief is based on the creation of the sciences that occurred in classical times. Now, is it soundly argued? Is it true that humanity changed because a few men in ancient Greece started to think a certain way about things?

*Michalopoulos*: Well, he does put forward his belief in the validity of ancient Greek civilization, and he says that is based on the absolute equality which existed in Greece, particularly among the citizens of Athens. And, in fact, he pays a great tribute to the continuity of civilization, which he thinks is owing to the defense of freedom in combination with the triumphs of science. Let me read this little paragraph: "The man who tills our soil owes his enjoyment of the commonest goods which plentifully supply his needs to the long continued labors of industry assisted by science: his enjoyment of these goods can be traced even further back to the victory of Salamis, but for which Oriental despotism would have engulfed the world."

*Adam*: I think that is a magnificent description of the beginnings of the materialist philosophy, which I presume you do not share.

*Michalopoulos*: I do not. But I don't quite follow your line of argument—

*Adam*: Because there, surely, Condorcet is pointing up human good in terms of material production. It allows you to make more food from the land, to create crafts—

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, but he does say that the "enjoyment of these goods can be traced even further back to the victory of Salamis"—that is to say, to the defense of freedom by people who fought against

oriental despotism. He does insist on freedom all the way through. The power that he completely ignores, and casts aside as superstition, is God.

*Adam:* Yes.

*Michalopoulos:* He will have nothing to do with God. And so there seems to me to be in this book a concentration on purely human and material ends.

*Adam:* Thank you, Mr. Michalopoulos!

*Michalopoulos:* As regards intellectual values, I'm completely with him, Mr. Adam, but not to the point where he insists on the complete supremacy of man and of man's brain. Man's brain is just a little matter in a cranium.

*Bryson:* But I would like to oppose an idea to both of your positions, if I may, because it seems to me that what Condorcet is saying can very well be said again (and in his time one saw the catastrophic effect of its denial). That is: unless men have freedom to pursue their ordinary, daily occupations and gain their ordinarily desired human needs, which are material in basis, you're going to have not only a great deal of human suffering and misery but explosions which destroy civilization. This seems to me to be profoundly true.

*Adam:* I think it is. You and I have argued this matter at various times and various places. It all depends on your, and to some extent Condorcet's, idea of freedom. In the chapter on the fourth stage he says that one of the important events in human history was the death of Socrates. He calls it "the first crime that marked the beginning of the war between philosophy and superstition." Now Condorcet meant that. And here freedom means freedom of inquiry, the freedom of the individual mind to inquire, to break down, even—if necessary—to destroy. I wanted to discover, more as a student of politics than as an individual, that there's another freedom—the freedom of men to continue, to keep their faiths and their beliefs and their continuity. That freedom can be attacked by the philosopher. The French *Philosophes* who created the French Revolution, who will always create revolutions, can also be enemies of freedom. Condorcet raises a very amusing and interesting point. What does he really mean? Does he just want his particular arrogance, the arrogance of the logical philosopher, to stand and dictate to human beings?

*Bryson:* Answer it in my behalf, Mr. Michalopoulos.

*Michalopoulos:* No, because I find myself torn between the two of you. I'm inclined to agree with Mr. Adam—

*Bryson:* Oh, I'm always inclined to agree with him! That's why it's both fun and dangerous to argue with him.

*Michalopoulos:* But don't you agree with me that something in the man revolts against every feeling of religion?

*Adam:* Yes, Condorcet is unreasonable—

*Michalopoulos:* He's unreasonably fanatical.

*Bryson:* He's not only against the church, he's against the whole idea of any transcendent or, in the ordinary meaning of the term, religious meaning in life. He just doesn't believe in it.

*Michalopoulos:* Doesn't believe it, and fights it.

*Bryson:* He fights it because of his education.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes. And what he has put in its place is something mechanical. It's Galileo's magnetic compass. It's the Integral Calculus. Today it would be Univac.

*Adam*: Gentlemen, be careful—you're destroying progress! I don't want to go as far as you two want to go, I want to save a little of the belief in progress. Perhaps if we went on to the fifth stage, we might recover progress.

*Bryson*: Well, the fifth stage is from the division of the sciences to their decline, where he gets himself through the Middle Ages in a rather contemptuous fashion.

*Adam*: I thought that was in the sixth stage?

*Bryson*: Well, he touches on them in the fifth stage, and in the sixth he does them in. At present the so-called Dark Ages are being restored to a sort of respectability. Many shafts of light are now penetrating them, but Condorcet still thinks they were just dark.

*Adam*: His sixth stage is "The decadence of knowledge to its restoration about the time of the Crusades."

*Bryson*: But not *by* the Crusades; he doesn't believe the Crusades ever brought logic and reason and humanity back.

*Adam*: No, of course they didn't.

*Bryson*: They were explosions of religious sentiment and other things.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, they were mostly explosions of banditry.

*Adam*: I want to attack the representative of ancient Europe on the flanks. Mr. Michalopoulos, do you really accept Condorcet's contention that providence and all our notions about providence—I don't mean in terms of strict religion, but the whole idea of a fixed, determinate, universal law—is all pure nonsense?

*Michalopoulos*: No, I don't believe it's all pure nonsense.

*Adam*: Well, how do you manage to fit in your French and logical reasoning?

*Michalopoulos*: My reasoning is not French and logical, it is Hellenic and broad.

*Adam*: How did the French get their strict and logical reasoning unless by interpreting the Hellenic traditions?

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, everyone has interpreted the Hellenic tradition. It's been interpreted in England and in this country in various ways. The French have got an extraordinarily powerful capacity for logical argument, but it's *logic*—it's not reason, as we understand reason.

*Bryson*: That distinction will have to be explained. How do you distinguish—I'm not saying you *can't*—but how do you distinguish between what the French call logic and what you call reason?

*Michalopoulos*: For example: the French have to have a very carefully written constitution for their government, while the British Constitution is entirely unwritten, and yet it functions. And, on the whole, British political life is more stable than French political life.

*Bryson*: More *reasonable*, you would say.

*Michalopoulos*: At home, yes. Not in their international behavior.

*Bryson*: Well, we're not talking about imperialism—although, as a matter of fact, Condorcet takes a few shots at colonialism.

*Adam:* That is a very important point.

*Michalopoulos:* I agree with him on that very strongly, as you may imagine.

*Adam:* I think we should stress his views on colonialism. He is a very true prophet in pointing out that self-determination for the greater part of the peoples of the world is absolutely inevitable—something we still overlook today, to some extent.

*Bryson:* But I think we're also overlooking some of the little concrete things that he talks about, which make him so interesting and so vulnerable. For instance, his childlike faith—may I say childlike?—in the power of print. He seems to believe that if men can just get books, nothing will ever go wrong in the world again.

*Michalopoulos:* But, my dear sir, that's exactly what I've been saying: that he would have the same childlike faith in Univac today, if he'd lived. Remington Rand or IBM would be God to him. That is where progress lies for him—in these machines and wheels and cogs which are all the result, of course, of the fertility of human imagination. And they're very useful in their place; we should say nothing against IBM—it's a most magnificent institution, and I hope it helps the progress of humanity. But if there is not the *will* to progress, the *will* to happiness, the *will* to do good, there will not be good in the world. And the will to do good depends on the moral quality of the individual and of collective society, not on the machines we use. You can't hang machines up in the universe and expect them to work for progress all by themselves. Life and progress and good depend on something that is beyond what we can seize with our limited human minds. We are not the center of everything in the world, in the universe.

*Adam:* Very finely expressed, Mr. Michalopoulos; much better than I could possibly have done it.

*Michalopoulos:* Do you agree?

*Adam:* Oh, yes. But do you feel that you can fit progress into this idea of the necessity of good will?

*Michalopoulos:* Certainly.

*Adam:* You are an enemy of progress! But I just want to know what our justification is for believing in this very novel, this very recent, idea. None of our ancestors really believed in it until Condorcet and his family of French revolutionary thinkers appeared. What is our justification today for following Condorcet? Why do we believe in progress?

*Michalopoulos:* Well, probably because we have seen some of the results—and now I'm going to be the devil's advocate. Condorcet foretold some things. I suppose he thought they would happen in France. Of course, they could *never* happen in France, certainly not the first two that I'm going to mention here. He foretold the equality of the sexes, which is coming to pass in many countries, particularly in this country. He foretold the abolition of "marriages of interest and convenience." That has happened here in the United States, not in France. He foretold the abandonment of misguided notions of austerity and of hoarding of money. That's certainly not happened in France. Over here, people believe in spending as an economic theory for happiness.



He works out a social security system and an old-age insurance system—and there he brings in his old calculus and says that that will make it possible for private insurance companies to insure people for old age and so forth. I know nothing about mathematics, but I presume that the calculus has helped. And he says that education should be geared to serve the needs of the citizen in administering his household affairs in freedom—by which he means that education should be practical rather than entirely theoretical and should help people to live well. He foretells birth control, which has some advocates today. He also foretells a universal language of symbols. Now that is very interesting, because it has been put into practice, effectively, in international telegraphic code communications for shipping. I feel that you can't get anywhere with a language like Esperanto, because you cannot build a language if there's not a living organic basis for it. But a language of symbols, for practical purposes, as he foresaw, is actually used on ships. If you send an SOS message it is understood in every language.

*Bryson:* The same thing is true in the fact that all scientists can converse across any language barrier in mathematics. But now here's the point that I think one has to make up his mind about: in believing in these material elements, was he fooling himself? As you have just pointed out, Mr. Michalopoulos, a great many of the things that he called progress have actually taken place.

*Adam:* Yes, but what are the results? Are we any better off than we were in the old days?

*Bryson:* I should say quite definitely—and I'm quoting you from a previous conversation—that the man who in those days was tied to the soil and lived a miserable, short life, is now very much better off in most of the Western nations of the world.

*Adam:* Yes, I would agree with that part.

*Michalopoulos:* But Lecomte du Nouy says that for the first time in history the conflict between pure intelligence—and that is Condorcet—between pure intelligence and moral values has come to be one of life and death.

*Bryson:* But I should say to you, and also in answer to Mr. Adam's profound skepticism about the value of progress—he doesn't doubt its existence, he just wonders if it's worth-while—that it is possible for pure intelligence and moral values to live together in the same world. I think a peaceful coexistence is probably ahead of us in that, not a conflict to the death.

# SIR THOMAS MALORY

## *Le Morte d'Arthur*

*(As broadcast December 9, 1956)*

DAVID DAICHES • E. TALBOT DONALDSON • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Sir Thomas Malory is one man, among those who have written books in jail, who was there for a very good reason. He was in jail because he committed a great many crimes, things that were crimes in those days and would probably be considered even more vicious in our day. And yet, in a curious way, I suppose he thought he was explaining a code of morals in this collection he made of the legends of an earlier time.

*Daiches:* Yes, I think he did. These extraordinary stories are essentially tales of adventures that took place in a lost world no longer available to Malory, who was writing from a later vantage point. It was a world where life had been governed by a code of what he calls "worships." That is, of honor or chivalry. Life was mysterious—anything was liable to happen to anybody at any time—but the part of a man of a man of honor was to apply the code, which was a sort of moral athleticism. You are loyal, but if anyone angers you or disgraces you, you try to bump him off. It's as simple as that.

*Donaldson:* I think the primitivism of Malory in his own life relates very directly to the primitivism of the code. The only trouble is that Malory apparently has no well-defined notion of chivalry in his own life. So he goes directly ahead, according to history, and takes things that don't belong to him, rather in the fine athletic spirit of his own knights.

*Bryson:* He came in the middle of the fifteenth century. This is before Shakespeare, quite a long time before, and yet it's a thousand years after these deeds of chivalry. How much of chivalry was left in England by the middle of the fifteenth century?

*Donaldson:* Well, there's a question as to whether chivalry really existed at all.

*Bryson:* It's just an old fairy tale?

*Donaldson:* Many people feel that it was invented in the past; and, as a matter of fact, some of the first mentions of chivalry do refer to it as something already dead.

*Bryson:* Does that mean that King Arthur never lived?

*Donaldson:* None of the historians believe he did, but we've no very good evidence either way.

*Daiches:* Isn't it one of the main points about stories of chivalry that they imply a sense of loss? You get it in Malory, you get it in Spenser, you get it even in the medieval romances—the feeling that there had been a code then but that life now is degenerate. You get that in Malory, even though, as you say, he wasn't very clearly aware of the code, which was simply a sort of primitive fair play. They're

all glorified football players in Malory—the knights, I mean. It's the strongest man who wins. Any question of justice is decided by trial by ordeal: two knights fight it out and the one who unhorses the other is right.

*Bryson*: Are you saying that that's true even in the case of the knights who went out on quests to save damsels from destruction? That there never was a time when there were brave knights in the world? That it's always been in a wonderful fairyland of the past?

*Daiches*: I think the whole notion of the chivalric quest is essentially nostalgic in origin and nature.

*Donaldson*: Yes, I agree entirely. The strongest emotional element in Malory is this feeling of nostalgia, and I think he picks that up from almost all treatments of chivalry. It is a dead world, a world that never really existed, but the mind wants to believe in that world and to find some sort of reality in it that it doesn't find in everyday life.

*Bryson*: You save yourself from despair about the world you live in by thinking, "Well, once there were strong, brave men and beautiful women, and once all these wonderful things could happen." And yet, really, these things were essentially tragic in nature.

*Donaldson*: Yes, that spirit of tragedy certainly shows very strongly in Malory. From the very beginning of the book one feels a powerful sense of foreboding. Even though Malory does not explicitly say so, as perhaps Shakespeare would, you cannot help feeling that this is all very transient and temporary, and that the whole order of knighthood is doomed almost as soon as it's instituted.

*Daiches*: I also have been very much impressed, in reading Malory again, by the quiet matter-of-fact way in which he recounts these tragic things. There's no overt sense of tragedy. It's what I call a "tragic deadpan." He doesn't change the level of his voice at all when he talks about these things, and that helps to give the impression of its being a lost world. It has the accent of dream, sometimes of nightmare—these strange castles where knights suddenly appear, bloody hand-swords waving in the air, magic beds, all that sort of thing. You don't quite know what makes the world tick. All you know is that anything may happen and that you've got to play your part. You stick to that rather simple code.

*Donaldson*: A knight doesn't seem to understand anything of what is going on about him. His only conception of reality is the integrity of his own code, and that code is not always well defined. He looks at the world and sees all sorts of strange things happening, but he must act in a way which is dictated to him.

*Bryson*: By what or by whom? King Arthur didn't call the knights in to the Round Table and say "Now look, boys, this is the way a good Round Table knight behaves." He never says that, does he? So who knew?

*Donaldson*: The knight apparently knows it intuitively, and it all depends upon his physical prowess.

*Bryson*: If somebody says "You're wrong" and you can push him off his horse, then you aren't wrong, you're right.

*Donaldson*: Not always. There are moments when it is obvious

that a knight is going to do something wrong and he does do it. But as soon as he is defeated by the other knight, he realizes that he's done something wrong and apologizes for it—and sometimes he's permitted to get away with it.

*Daiches:* And sometimes we even see the knights questioning themselves, asking to whether this would be a matter of worship, as they call it.

*Bryson:* "Worship" is a strange word, Mr. Daiches. What did they mean by it?

*Daiches:* Well, it recurs throughout Malory; I think it simply means the decent thing to do, a matter of fair play.

*Bryson:* It suggests Christianity—

*Daiches:* But I don't think it's Christian. It seems to me to derive much more from the old heroic world of Anglo-Saxon epic, the world of stern fatalism and of a sort of camaraderie among knightly equals. There are certain things you don't do to another knight. Of course, if he's *not* a knight, none of these strictures apply. But if another knight has been unhorsed and you're still on horseback, you get off your horse to fight with him. It wouldn't be a matter of worship to do otherwise. And certain quarrels aren't "quarrels of worship." That is to say, it doesn't become a knight to take them up. You just walk away.

*Bryson:* Where did Malory get all these ideas? Was he just a compiler, even if a compiler of genius? A great many of these laconic passages make your hair curl with their "deadpan tragedy"—he must have been a writer of great skill. He didn't just translate the old French tales, did he?

*Donaldson:* I believe he started to translate the old French tales, but as he went on, something overtook him. I suppose you might call it art. He began to feel his characters—vestigially at first, but by the great ending of the book his characters have been artistically realized.

*Bryson:* And he's made what was, in its origin, mostly a Celtic and French set of tales into a very English book, hasn't he?

*Donaldson:* He has indeed. I believe that the spirit of the *Morte d'Arthur* is very much the same spirit that appears quite often in Chaucer and earlier in the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*. It is the spirit of a universe which cannot be solved and must only be endured, though endured actively and aggressively by performing "worship."

*Daiches:* Yes, you play the game. But I was much interested in what you said about his becoming more of an artist as he goes on. That seems to me to be very clear as you read through the tales in the order in which they appear to have been composed. The final section on the death of Arthur seems to me to be a perfect little tragic sequence in itself. Because there you see the different elements involved in being a man and being a knight of worship in conflict with each other. Arthur is the king, Sir Launcelot must be loyal to him as his feudal superior; but Launcelot is also in love with Arthur's queen, Guenever, with whom he's been having a prolonged affair. A knight must be loyal to his lady, he must be loyal to his king; the two, in the end, are incompatible. And in endeavoring to serve both, he destroys himself, his lady, his king, and his friends, and the whole fellowship

of the Round Table becomes, in Malory's lovely word, "disparbeled."

*Bryson*: Is it because this was an essential sin that made knight-hood impossible, or is it something deeper and more mysterious?

*Daiches*: I think there are two elements involved. One is that life itself, in Malory, is mysterious. It isn't Christian, it seems to me. The treatment of the Grail story is not the treatment of a Christian universe which manifests itself by certain understandable signs. Rather, these are mysteries which can manifest themselves on the most awkward occasions for no real reason at all. That, I think, is the first point—that life is mysterious, rather than Christian. And the other point is that you've always got to *act*. That's the only way life can be carried on.

*Bryson*: When you say "you," you're talking about the knight. The other people didn't count, did they?

*Daiches*: No, there aren't many common people in Malory, but where there are they're just part of the setting. They're not persons at all.

*Donaldson*: Reverting for the moment to the matter of what is "worship"—I think that Malory's worship differs from the Germanic epic tradition and all other epic traditions in the fact that is generally, particularly at the beginning of the book, highly practical. Worship should, I suppose, mean your reputation—the enduring reputation that will go on as a practical result for years and years after you're dead. Malory tends, in the beginning of the book, always to think of worship as something that has *immediate* practical results. It does you good. It even makes you money, which is not really very chivalric in the highest sense.

*Daiches*: But reputation, of course, is the most important thing of all in this society.

*Bryson*: Now, you gentlemen have named some of the things that go into this ideal of knighthood. You've named this athletic ability, this ability to win a fight. Because it's always a fight. It's never any other contest—well, there *are* other contests, but they don't amount to anything. Then there's this generosity to the one who is weaker than you, by reason of being dismounted or something like that; it's never because he just happens not to be as strong as you. Then this sense of fair play, and this love of the tools of the trade—the sword, for instance. But not, so much, love of the horse—is that right?

*Daiches*: I was astonished at the complete indifference to the sufferings of animals. Dogs, perhaps, there is a trace of affection for, but horses are disemboweled right and left and you just find yourself another one. They're just pieces of property.

*Bryson*: And yet this code is not founded upon anything that we in the modern world would call justice. I confess that I find it a little difficult to breathe in this world. Physical prowess, mere athletic righteousness, so completely dominates everything else that the modern man finds it a little stifling.

*Donaldson*: It's a world entirely of the spirit. I say this, despite the fact that I don't believe Malory's approach is spiritual. But the only value seems to be integrity to the code; that's all that you care about.

*Bryson*: But the code is always enforced by force.

*Donaldson*: That's true, but the code, nevertheless, is the one reality to which you can cling.

*Daiches*: And endurance is a prime virtue. I mean, it goes right back to the old Anglo-Saxon notion of "This was overcome, so may this be." You hang on and you endure and above you is Fate, which is inexplicable and inevitable. There's a grim fatalism hanging over the whole thing. From the very beginning you have the feeling that the ultimate destiny of these people is out of human control. They simply carry on, according to the code.

*Bryson*: But don't we, when we use the word "chivalry," think that chivalry had a good deal to do with the attitude toward women? Is this a book out of which these worshipful attitudes toward women could be derived?

*Daiches*: Well, the women themselves don't play a particularly sympathetic part in Malory. Guenever is—

*Bryson*: You mean you didn't fall in love with Guenever when you read about her?

*Daiches*: Not in the least. She's a very shrewish person. Time and again she wilfully misunderstands her faithful servants, and drives them, at one point, to lunacy. Sir Launcelot runs mad for a long period in the woods as a result of her cruelty. She is brought to realize that she has misjudged him and says something like "I'm sorry I misunderstood you, Launcelot," and he says "Well, that's not the first time, you do it all the time, and I suppose I must just suffer it."

*Donaldson*: I think the fatalism that you mentioned earlier has a very direct bearing on the way women were treated. Behind Malory lies this courtly ideal of worshipping womanhood generally, and yet, within the book, the game is never worth the candle.

*Bryson*: The woman is never worth the worship?

*Daiches*: Excuse me for interrupting, but *nothing* in Malory is ever worth doing for its own sake. You just do it because the doing of it illustrates the fact that you're a man of worship. It's never of any intrinsic value, either. And neither are the causes that men fight for.

*Donaldson*: All you're left with, in the ultimate reality, is the necessity to fight for a cause, even though you know the cause is perhaps no good.

*Bryson*: But that seems to me to be inescapable logically. If the last word rests upon a man's muscles, then no cause can really be worth fighting for because all that is settled by the victory is that one man is stronger than the other. It doesn't prove anything about one cause being more important than another. This, I think, shows that I'm really not very sympathetic with this version of the chivalric ideal. To confess it, I like the more sentimental modern versions better. I think I can live with Tennyson's *Knights of the Round Table* better than I can with Malory's.

*Daiches*: Oh, it's perfectly true there is something rather terrifying about the almost casual way in which, when Guenever is suspected of infidelity to Arthur, everyone says "Of course she must be burnt, unless her knight can defeat the knight who accuses her." That just makes one's hair stand on end. Tennyson says "My strength is as the

strength of ten because my heart is pure," and that answers Mr. Bryson's question. In Tennyson there is a sentimental correlation between strength and virtue, but in Malory it's wholly unsentimental. I don't think Malory is really saying that a man wins because he's right, he's saying something much more terrifying: he's right because he wins.

*Bryson*: Yes, that is terrifying.

*Daiches*: And that is the human lot. Life is like that.

*Donaldson*: But I think almost always in this book the man who is right *does* win. That is, I can't remember any strict injustices up until the final tragedy, where everything is an injustice. Before that, the cards have been neatly stacked so that virtue always does triumph.

*Bryson*: But at the end you have two conflicting virtues, Mr. Donaldson.

*Donaldson*: Yes, two conflicting virtues ruin everything. It's interesting that with so primitive and oversimplified an ideal, even such a simplification becomes complicated. You have only one loyalty to knighthood, but that knighthood subdivides loyalty to the king and loyalty to one's lady. Everything blows up when that rock is struck.

*Daiches*: Because he can't really come to terms with it. Malory is a sort of pragmatist, really. And when these two loyalties come into conflict with each other, he doesn't know how to handle it any more than he knows how to handle the real meaning of the supernatural in life. I was impressed by that very fine elegiac ending, where he stops short of saying that Arthur after his final defeat and departure will come back, which was the great tradition. What he says is this:

*Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say, here in this world he changed his life.*

What he means by that last haunting phrase, I don't know. Perhaps he didn't know.

*Donaldson*: I think that's one of the most wonderful qualities of the entire book. Malory is so beautifully imprecise again and again. For instance, his phrase "ladies, gentlemen and damsels . . ." The average reader gets the impression of a kind of glamorous array of femininity. I don't believe there's any difference between a lady and a damsel, and I don't think Malory believes it either. But he can always suggest an age one hates to call "glamorous," but an age that has extraordinary significance behind the lines. He actually doesn't describe any such world, but he *suggests* it. And I think his dialogue is infinitely suggestive. You have a dialogue between two people; one of them gives a long series of alternatives—this happens again and again—but for the knight there is no alternative. He always knows his course of action. So that after everything has been explained by one speaker, the other speaker pays no attention to it and says "Well, I must go ahead."

*Daiches*: Yes, "There's nothing else for me to do."

*Bryson:* But isn't this part of the fact that there is almost no quality of mind in this book? These great men, these great athletes, these great powers for righteousness according to the code, never really *think*, do they?

*Donaldson:* That is perfectly true, Mr. Bryson. In one of Malory's sources there's a knight called Sir Dinadan, and all of his actions are a criticism of the stupidities of this particular code. Malory cannot permit that within his world because he realizes, probably, that intelligent thought—which is really what Sir Dinadan represents—would blow up the whole thing. So that Sir Dinadan, instead of being a constant critic who doesn't particularly like to put his lady on a pedestal, who doesn't believe in knocking down the first knight he runs into, is in Malory very carefully treated.

*Daiches:* Reflection would reduce the hero to a fool, would make Sir Launcelot into a Don Quixote. It's a very unreflective work. And I was interested in what you said a moment ago about these various labels for women—lady, damsel, and so on. Isn't that part of this extraordinary distance-effect that Malory gives us? When you see these people in groups, or troops, they're wonderful; as soon as we look at them one by one, they're not. The assembled knights in their pavilions, streamers flying and their full panoply on, are thoroughly glamorous and have all the sense of chivalric glory. But look at them individually and they're a pretty seamy crowd, aren't they? Every one of them.

*Bryson:* Haven't you just said again, in different and far more enlightening terms, that he stands at the threshold of the modern world? He's looking back at this ancient world, which we keep forgetting was a thousand years before his own time, although it was closer to him than it is to us, and man finally is beginning to emerge as an individual instead of being just a part of a pageant.

*Donaldson:* I think that's very true, though I might argue with you whether that was not just as characteristically medieval as it is modern. But this contrast between glamorous pageant and rather seamy reality is, in a way, a symbol of the quality of the whole book. You feel the extraordinary charm of the pictured world and then, time after time, it turns into crass reality. That seems to be the entire tendency of Malory's mind: he tries to romanticize, but in the long run reality defeats him.

*Bryson:* But just in that tension you get a great book. It wouldn't be a great book if it succeeded only in giving us the glamour without making us begin to wonder.

*Daiches:* And of course Sir Launcelot—who is the real hero, it seems to me, throughout all these stories—is a very human person, full of very human defects. Sir Galahad, who is the hero of the Grail section, doesn't really belong in that group at all. He comes from another world. His motivation is obscure, his character is completely undefined, he's the flattest, it seems to me, of all the knights.

*Bryson:* We have one character that we haven't even mentioned, and that's the magician Merlin. Now what is he—just a kind of spokesman for the mysterious forces of nature?

*Daiches:* Well, he's the one man who thinks. To think in this



world is to be a magician, and to be a magician is to know the future but not to be able to do anything about it. He can't even save himself from his ultimate doom. He simply has this bitter knowledge of the inevitability of destruction for the whole of the Round Table.

*Donaldson*: Yes, it is interesting and perhaps somewhat sardonic that the one really intelligent man in the whole book disappears at the very beginning. He cannot go on existing in this world, either.

*Bryson*: This is the thing that disturbs me, ultimately, about the morals of this chivalric world as Malory depicts it. Nobody really knows what to do—except that if he has real doubt he can go find somebody who disagrees with him and knock him on the head.

*Daiches*: All you can do is, in the good old British phrase, to carry on. This book seems to me one of the great germinal works of the code of British sportsmanship. You're in a bewildering and mysterious world, all sorts of odd and inexplicable things happen—but you do your stuff, you keep fighting the other man, you *carry on*.

*Bryson*: If you really believe that it's the source of the ideal of sportsmanship, you've said something about it of immense importance—because that ideal of sportsmanship carries right through and is the very basis of modern civilization.

*Daiches*: Well, I think it is one of the major sources, and to that extent it's a work of great historical importance.

*Donaldson*: And it is, in the long run, admirable though not intellectual.

*Bryson*: Admirable as a book, admirable as a world?

*Donaldson*: No, an admirable quality—fidelity and carrying on regardless of what happens.

*Bryson*: Ah, yes, I'm sure that's one of the most important qualities—perhaps, in the long run, *the* most important. And maybe it has a stronger base in a fairy tale that you can find anywhere in the real world.

## LORD BYRON

### *Don Juan*

(As broadcast December 16, 1956)

PERRY MILLER

•

CHARLES POORE

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: When Lord Byron got himself into so much trouble that he had to leave England for his own good, he turned around and made improper gestures back at his native country. It just happened that he was one of the great poets, and so he couldn't help making that gesture in verse.

*Miller*: You are, of course, referring to *Don Juan*, which he wrote during his exile in Italy. It is certainly considered his masterpiece, though it makes a very strange contrast to the works that he

won his initial fame with. They were immensely solemn and serious and romantic creations like *Manfred* and *Conrad* and *Childe Harold*. This is a funny book; it remains one of the funniest, one of the wittiest, books that have ever been written.

*Bryson*: It seems impossible that he could have been funny for verse after verse after verse—how long is the thing?

*Miller*: It's sixteen cantos. He was writing it from 1818 up to the time he left for Greece in 1823, and apparently could have gone on forever.

*Poore*: And it does go on forever in your mind, doesn't it?

*Miller*: That's one of the charms of it. Of course, he boasts that it was improvisation, and his claims that it is an epic are humorous. But what do *you* think, Mr. Poore? You're used to dealing with books that have levels of meaning. It seems to me that this one has meanings behind meanings. It is funny on the surface, but there's something else at work there. Don't you think so?

*Poore*: I do. With books that have several levels of meaning I always use either an escalator or a ladder. But the levels of meaning in Byron really pile up; they make you look twice and sometimes three times, and then you still wonder for a minute. You find these layers of meaning not only in the humor, but in the more serious passages where he's talking about politics, which interested him very much, or where he's talking about philosophy, which it was his passion to ignore—

*Miller*: Oh, he definitely hates abstract ideas because he thinks they stifle life.

*Bryson*: So he can't help talking about them.

*Miller*: Byron had a very good mind, you know. But he thought that when poets like the Lake Poets, Wordsworth and Southey, whom he despised and called the "Pond Poets"—

*Poore*: That's wonderful, isn't it?

*Miller*: Yes. It's like Edgar Allan Poe referring to the New England poets as "The Frogpondians" because they all gathered round the pond in Boston Common. Byron despised the Lake Poets mainly because he felt that they were importing abstract ideas into living poetry, and then, as proof of the fact that this was wrong, they all turned out to be reactionaries and high churchmen.

*Bryson*: And he, of course, being a great aristocrat by birth, couldn't think of being a reactionary—he had to be a democrat.

*Miller*: But he already had the handful of silver, so that he didn't have to leave them.

*Bryson*: Yes, he already had "the riband to stick in his coat" as well as the income.

*Poore*: Well, he didn't have enough income to keep him in the style in which he wanted to live.

*Miller*: There wouldn't be enough income in the world for that! Yet he was generous enough.

*Bryson*: He helped other poets, that's true. But why is it that he, who is almost the archetype of the romantic poet, hated all the other people who were also supposed to be romantic poets? What did he think of Shelley?

*Miller*: He was shocked by Shelley because Shelley was an atheist, while Byron, who had the reputation of being the Great Immoralist of the age, was really at heart a very religious man who could accept the concept of sin as applied to himself as well as to others. And he considered Shelley's moral perfectionism a way of kidding himself, pretending that he was virtuous when he was doing evil things. Byron would never deceive himself.

*Poore*: That's absolutely right. He also looked down on Keats. I think the only time they ever came together was in that wonderful poem of Dorothy Parker's. Do you remember it?—because I don't.

*Bryson*: I'm afraid I don't, but do you follow Dorothy Parker in thinking that maybe Lord Byron's attitude toward Keats was just snobbishness?

*Poore*: It was certainly snobbishness. We have to remember that he became a lord in a very roundabout way.

*Bryson*: And so he was more self-conscious about it.

*Poore*: What was it—his great grand-uncle?

*Miller*: Something like that, I've forgotten. Yes, it was—

*Poore*: And there was still a brother who also had to die first. So that he was almost a convert to the House of Lords.

*Miller*: I object to the idea that snobbishness explains his attitude toward Keats. He really thought that Keats's luscious kind of poetry was an abuse of the faculties of the mind. Byron is a hard-headed fellow, for all that he is the great creator of these supposedly mysterious supermen of the Romantic period—Manfred and so on. And Byron felt that Keats's *Endymion* was an indulgence in sensuous emotion of a kind that was unworthy of a serious poet.

*Bryson*: He didn't like Keats because he was too lush. He didn't like Shelley because he excused his misdeeds behind lovely abstractions, whereas Byron admitted his own. Why, then, didn't he like Wordsworth and Coleridge?

*Miller*: I think it was basically opposition to their use of abstractions in poetry. But of course there is the political thing as well. He hated Coleridge and Wordsworth and Southey because, having been revolutionaries in their youth, they became reactionaries in their old age. We've got to remember that *Don Juan*, for all that it seems to be a comic masquerade, is one of the great statements of political liberalism. It reflects the nationalism that survived the Congress of Vienna.

*Poore*: And still survives wonderfully.

*Miller*: But this was after the collapse of Napoleon—and, of course, Byron perversely admired Napoleon at a time when it was generally agreed by all respectable people that he was a villain. One of the real thrusts—there are many I think, beneath the mask of *Don Juan*—is the political radicalism. It comes out in an attack upon the conservative reaction of his Bourbon hero.

*Poore*: Well, oddly enough, Byron also objected very much to the taxes that the government was levying at that time. In that he certainly was a conservative.

*Bryson*: Well, is that so strange? Doesn't it happen often that a man who in his own life is something of a snob, and who is very

self-conscious about the fact that he belongs to an aristocracy, has for the people in general a great respect and can be a radical? An aristocratic radical.

*Poore*: We've had them in this country.

*Miller*: That is the thing about Byron—that he was a liberal as a nobleman because he understood what freedom meant and could match it. But he had very little use for the social reformers who wanted to extend suffrage and that kind of thing. He said he would run Leigh Hunt through with his sword if he ever met him again. But he believed in freedom. Take this, for example—I think it is one of the great stanzas in *Don Juan*:

*And I will war, at least in words (and—should  
My chance so happen—deeds), with all who war  
With Thought;—and of Thought's foes by far most rude  
Tyrants and sycophants have been and are.  
I know not who may conquer: if I could  
Have such a prescience, it should be no bar  
To this my plain, sworn, downright detestation  
Of every despotism in every nation.*

You have to be a very grand nobleman to be able to say: "I don't care how it's going to come out; I, Lord Byron, will fight to the end!"

*Poore*: But he would remain *Lord* Byron—he would never become Citizen Byron.

*Miller*: Oh, there's no question of that. In fact, when he finally decides that he's very much in love with the Countess Guiccioli, he tells his good friend Tom Moore that he thinks he probably can marry her because, after all, her station in Italy is not inferior to his own.

*Bryson*: He hated the people who were for moderate reform. He hated newly-made nobleman—some of them, like Wellington, for instance, perhaps not just for that: he hated *him* because he had destroyed Napoleon.

*Miller*: Well, also because Wellington became the leader of reaction in England.

*Bryson*: But now, did he really hate England? In *Don Juan* he sends his hero, this little Spanish boy, back to England and starts making fun of English society.

*Poore*: But how affectionately he does it!

*Bryson*: You think so, Mr. Poore?

*Poore*: No one has written about a return to England as eloquently, except, oddly enough, Kipling in that poem about the exiles in Peru.

*Miller*: But of course Byron immediately undercuts that, as throughout *Don Juan* he undercuts everything that he advances seriously except, I think, political liberalism. He has Don Juan, you know, stand on a hill overlooking London and say "Here is freedom's chosen station, here peals the people's voice." And just as Juan is in an ecstasy of adoration and admiration for England, he is interrupted by a footpad with "Damn your eyes! Your money or your life!" The whole point of the poem, it seems to me, is that he constantly under-

cuts his serious ideas in order to suggest to his readers that this is the obverse of the reverse of a medal—the reverse being, of course, Manfred and the “Byronic” hero.

*Poore*: Or Childe Harold.

*Miller*: Childe Harold above all. And this is the other side: at the center of the romantic hero there is an irony, and the irony can be agonizingly open or it can be agonizingly concealed.

*Poore*: There’s almost a kind of desperation about his anxiety to keep undercutting his serious ideas. It’s as if he were performing the incredible gymnastic feat of standing on a rug writing *Don Juan* and, every once in a while, reaching down to pull the rug out from under himself.

*Bryson*: But he does it both ways, and that’s one of the things that make this a very great poem. When you reread it, as I just did, you realize how much we tend to underestimate Byron these days. We sort of shove him aside as something that used to be a sensation but is terribly passé now. Yes, he can do it both ways: he not only can pull the rug out just at the time when he seems to be very serious, but also when he’s being very funny he sometimes catches you off guard and touches you, moves you very deeply.

*Poore*: He says “I will laugh at myself, but don’t *you*.”

*Bryson*: Exactly. I don’t think any reader of ordinary sensitivity would ever be looking for fun in these serious verses. They touch you to the quick.

*Miller*: It is the looking for fun that makes you read on, though, isn’t it?

*Bryson*: Why, of course! That’s why he catches you off guard.

*Miller*: And Byron deliberately works it out that way, much more than he promised when he said “I will show you a shipwreck and a battle and a lot of other things.”

*Poore*: Especially the “lot of other things.”

*Miller*: I think one of the keys to this double-edged quality is his ironic use of the sublime. In the Romantic age, the “sublime” was a very definite conception. Byron’s great creation of his early period, *Childe Harold*, was in the vein of the sublime: “Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll!” In *Don Juan* the sublime is so intolerable an emotion that one can hardly live with it; the only way one can live with it is by mixing admiration with ironic depreciation. And that’s a complex state of mind.

*Bryson*: This man was almost the prototype of the Great Lover. And he takes—with perfectly clear intent, of course—the name of a great lover for his hero, this little Spanish boy.

*Miller*: Yes, I think that’s part of the deliberate comic strategy of the poem. The Don Giovanni of Mozart is, of course, a titanic lover. The Don Juan of Byron is a sweet boy, a very innocent, loving, charming fellow who learns his way around in sophisticated and corrupt *milieux* like the court of Catherine the Great, but he’s really quite uncorrupted.

*Poore*: And quite unconvincing. That scene at the court of Catherine really is preposterous.

*Bryson*: I think you have to say a little more about that, Mr.

Poore. Here is a boy who, after this battle in which he has performed prodigies of valor—

*Poore:* Which we never see him really performing.

*Bryson:* No, we just are told that he's very brave and wonderful, although he's still a stripling, as Mr. Miller said. He's sent to the court of this notably, shall we say, *friendly*—

*Miller:* Hospitable.

*Bryson:* —This notably hospitable queen who's always looking for handsome soldiers. He's sent there as a messenger; Queen Catherine sees him walking toward her, and every dragoon at court is immediately scared stiff because he sees his chances of winning the Queen's favor slipping away. Here comes this Spanish boy, and Catherine wants him for a lover.

*Poore:* That's satire on bureaucracy; when a new man rises in Washington, the same thing happens.

*Miller:* There is also, I think, the Byronic dream—Byron's dream of himself. He was, in spite of his clubfoot, a very handsome youth and had a great deal of success, both social and amorous.

*Poore:* He was a good athlete, too.

*Miller:* He played for Harrow against Eton.

*Bryson:* But he was the "sought" not the "seeker" in every one of these love affairs.

*Miller:* You mean his own love affairs, not Don Juan's?

*Bryson:* Yes. Now is Byron saying, in effect, "All my love affairs happened because women just followed me around—I couldn't help myself"?

*Poore:* "I did it out of politeness."

*Miller:* There's a certain amount of ironic defense of himself, I think.

*Bryson:* Or is it contempt for women?

*Miller:* No, I don't think so.

*Poore:* He protests too much too often, but I think he really appreciates women.

*Miller:* Part of the pose of *Don Juan* is that the author has been the fool of love, but it only brings you back to the realization that this poem is by the author of *Manfred* and *Childe Harold*. It wouldn't be effective if it weren't by a man who had already bared his bosom. What's the phrase?—"Byron made a pageant of his bleeding heart all across Europe." And now we see the old heart no longer bleeding.

*Bryson:* Well, he's only thirty-five years old—

*Miller:* I know, but he feels very, *very* old.

*Poore:* Oh, he feels seventy-five!

*Miller:* And so he's looking back upon his youth with great compassion, although all the love scenes are undercut. I think the most beautiful is the one with the Greek girl, Haidée, in which he was obviously drawing on his own experiences. But every time it comes to a note of tenderness, he injects the fact that Haidée provides him with food and that love thrives on beefsteak. But this is not intended really, I think, to denigrate Haidée; it's intended to say that the author of the poem has suffered and come out the other side.

*Bryson:* But doesn't it also show his enormous skill? In spite of

the fact that the beefsteaks always appear, as you say, when Haidée and Don Juan are enjoying their idyllic love affair—because this is the one that's really sweet and innocent . . .

*Miller*: Oh, this is really the one!

*Bryson*: The beefsteak, somehow, doesn't take the idyllic quality out of it.

*Miller*: No, on the contrary. Byron's contention is that it's perfectly natural and right that love should thrive on these things. That's the trouble with Shelley; Shelley tried to think love could exist without body, without food—ethereal—and Byron just snorted in masculine rage at that sort of thing.

*Poore*: He wanted the jug of wine and the loaf of bread as well as the "thou."

*Bryson*: Yes, and usually could get all three when he wanted them. But going back to my other point, did he want people to suppose that the Byronic lover was just a fiction for which he had some scorn, really? That he didn't believe in the Byronic hero at all?

*Poore*: No, I think that he believed in the Byronic hero, but only in *Byron* as the Byronic hero—just as he believed in the poet, but only in Byron as the poet.

*Miller*: Well, I do not agree with you. I think Byron had very much the sense that he was doing in English the sort of thing which Goethe did in *Werther*, that he was creating a literary figure which meant something for the age but wasn't to be taken literally. And Goethe shows, I think, that Byron had the right idea from the Goethean point of view, because Goethe was the most enthusiastic admirer of Byron on the Continent; and he felt that Byron was doing, with characters like Manfred and Childe Harold, just what he had done with Werther.

*Poore*: And there was always a Charlotte slicing the bread and butter.

*Bryson*: Yes, the bread and butter come in, but with a little more irony than Goethe usually had. But it's awfully hard for us to understand Byron's fame at this time—all those references to his being read on the banks of the Ohio, his references to Daniel Boone and to Washington—

*Miller*: You see, he had heard that he was being read in Louisville, Kentucky, and that's why he made this famous statement. But the fact of the matter is he *was* being read in the clearings of the American frontier. Byron's popularity in America, with ordinary people, was tremendous.

*Bryson*: But this was a popularity based upon poems like *Childe Harold*. What was the effect when he came out with this burst of humor and fun in *Don Juan*?

*Poore*: They liked that, too, very much.

*Miller*: That age could see that this was the other side of the Byronic hero; that the Byronic hero in action would be gigantic and solemn, but that in relaxation, with all passion spent, there would be irony, and that these two go together.

*Poore*: I think he wrote in *Don Juan* one of the best, probably, of all the picaresque novels of the nineteenth century.

*Bryson*: I suppose you can call it that, yes.

*Poore*: And they read it that way. It had all the elements of the modern American best seller: the love affair, the shipwreck, the battle—they're all there.

*Bryson*: But quite a lot more humor, Mr. Poore.

*Poore*: Yes, quite a lot more humor—and quite a lot more pride in authorship. We haven't spoken about his wonderful rhymes. Do you remember the one about swimming the Hellespont?

*Bryson*: Which he himself had done.

*Poore*: So that he can make fun of the stunt, but with what a rhyme!

*He could, perhaps, have passed the Hellespont,  
As once (a feat on which ourselves we prided)  
Leander, Mr. Ekenhead, and I did.*

*Miller*: But to go back to your question, Mr. Bryson, as to how he justified the Byronic hero. All these people, Americans and otherwise, who were reading Byron so avidly found in *Don Juan* a really serious moral comment on the other side. The man who has suffered nobly, though he's been a sinner, can do this job of appraisal in a humorous, detached spirit; and it seemed that this was really what the Byronic hero stood for—a figure of immense sincerity.

*Bryson*: It's a complex idea. I wonder about people who read it now. Mr. Miller, you have some association with youngsters who come for the first time to *Don Juan*; do they see this contrast?

*Miller*: I find it very difficult to convey. Modern forms of irony don't seem to prepare you for this particular romantic irony.

*Poore*: Well, it's amazing that a generation that admires the rhyming of Ogden Nash doesn't admire the rhyming of Byron.

*Miller*: I think they're afraid of the serious undercurrent, frankly. The Byronic form, which has this tremendous sincerity, this determination never to fake anything, even in the moments when he seems to be most grandiloquent, is a very hard thing for us to understand.

*Poore*: Well, wouldn't you say he faked in the shipwreck or the siege of Ismail?

*Bryson*: He faked to make fun of the heroics which he was, in a sense, satirizing. And yet I'm sure that both of you would say "Don't be put off by the fact that it's ironic; by all means go ahead and read it."

*Miller*: Oh, you must always read it!



# ST. PAUL

## Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians

(As broadcast December 23, 1956)

HAROLD C. CASE

• FRANK GIBNEY

• LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* St. Paul is perhaps the most fitting of all writers to discuss in the Christmas season, because in a very real sense he was the first *Christian* writer.

*Case:* That's true. He actually began to write his Epistles a few years after the death of Christ, and he died before the first Gospel was written, so that he laid the foundation of Christian literature; he was the interpreter of Christ, whom he worshipped with pure devotion, and he thought of the life and death and resurrection of Christ as the very heart of his faith. I think we would have to say that he belongs in the Christmas tradition because he's the earliest and in many ways the foremost interpreter of the life of Christ.

*Bryson:* I think most people don't realize that St. Paul lived and died and carried on all of his immense organizing and missionary work *before* the four Gospels were written. We think of the Gospels as being immediate eyewitness accounts, which of course they actually were not.

*Gibney:* It may have been fortunate that Paul never did see Christ, because his concept of Him is very different from the concept the other Apostles had. He sees Christ as the great Idea; the Incarnation was the act, as he says in one of the Epistles, in which "history has its fulfillment." To Paul, Christ was a justification of existence. His coming was an event that had been pre-ordained, it was the beginning of a universal idea—so that if Paul had actually known Christ on earth, the vision might almost have been imperfect for him.

*Bryson:* He wasn't a disciple in the ordinary sense of the term, was he? That is, he was not a man who had been told in person by Jesus of Nazareth to go and preach the living faith. He didn't get it that way.

*Gibney:* No. I'd say that Paul was a great organizer, a great theologian, a great missionary, but certainly not a disciple. He was a man who was faced with an event and appreciated the universal significance of this event, probably much more than those who *had* been eyewitnesses—the disciples themselves.

*Case:* It's an interesting thing that he quotes Christ only once in all of his writings, although the vision of Christ occupied Paul's mind completely. This vision, however, disregarded the earthly life of Christ. He always thought of Christ as a source of inspiration, but not as a person who had walked the common earth and had lived here an earthly life full of struggle.

*Bryson:* But his own life was full of struggle, full of the most heroic efforts. He was a zealot, and these letters that he wrote, these

Epistles, seem to have served different purposes at different times. Of course, the main purpose was to hold together these tiny little centers of Christian faith that he had established here and there in the Middle East. *Philippians*, if we can start with that, is the letter of a pastor writing to his flock, isn't it?

*Case*: It was in Philippi that Paul established his first mission. He was a crusader now, planting churches, and he thought of this first church as being the start of Christianity in Europe; he has particular affection for the people in the church at Philippi and he associates them with the beginnings of the Gospel in his hands. The letter takes on the pastoral tone of a father speaking to his children, warning them to come up to the level he has idealized for them.

*Bryson*: He wrote to these people in Greek, but I suppose that Paul began his life speaking Hebrew, didn't he? Being a well educated man of his time, he must have used Greek with great facility—and undoubtedly he also spoke Latin.

*Case*: He was familiar with these languages and addressed the people who spoke Greek in Greek. I'm sure that he preached again and again in Greek, although without any question he had complete facility in the use of Hebrew. This distinguished him, by the way, from most of the religious leaders of his day.

*Bryson*: He was more scholarly?

*Case*: More scholarly, and had more substantive knowledge. He had studied in the school of Gamaliel, the great school of the time.

*Bryson*: He was also a man of the world, not a simple fisherman from the shores of Galilee.

*Gibney*: That's the terribly interesting thing about Paul, and it's very good evidence that he was the first great non-provincial of all the Apostles. You notice in *The Acts* that when Paul speaks to the throng, it specifically says that he speaks in Hebrew. It was evidently assumed that most of the time, as a good Roman citizen, Paul spoke in Latin or in Greek. And it's an interesting point, too, that he seemed to pride himself on his Roman citizenship. Paul really, consciously, felt that he was a universal man. He was a citizen in good standing of this world that stretched from one end of the Mediterranean to the other. He was very quick to throw himself on the mercy of the Roman authorities whenever he got into a tight spot.

*Bryson*: Well, that brings us right back to his imprisonment in Rome. *Would* you call it imprisonment, Mr. Gibney?

*Gibney*: It was more like house arrest.

*Bryson*: He was waiting for trial, though.

*Case*: And there is a passage about his being constantly in the hands of the Praetorian Guard. But, after all, he was a Roman citizen and, until the very moment of his trial and imprisonment, I think he had fairly liberal treatment. One of the interpreters of Paul says that the members of the Praetorian Guard probably sat around, bored to death, as Paul talked with the representatives of his churches who came to him for counsel and advice. And then, of course, he was permitted not only to write fully and freely but to *send out* these letters; they were actually mailed, they weren't verbally transmitted by his followers.

*Bryson:* It's hard for us to realize it now, but we've been told over and over again that the Romans regarded Christianity as a kind of political subversion. Paul, in their eyes, was almost as dangerous as the Communists seem to us. The Christians were persecuted because they seemed to be a threat to the Roman Empire—they were subversive, they were "radicals."

*Case:* Yes, and that is part of the reason for Paul's arrest.

*Bryson:* Yet they let him go on writing—

*Case:* They did, but the great era of persecution followed Paul. He sensed that it was coming, and in his letters he was continually warning his followers that they would have to stand fast in the faith. He could see that the Roman legions would eventually clamp down on the Christians.

*Bryson:* There's no legend or evidence, is there, that he made any converts among the Praetorian Guard?

*Case:* Well, only that one instance where he was allowed to go forth from prison during the earthquake. The prison-keeper said he believed that the earthquake was a sign that God was with Paul and his fellows and not with the Romans.

*Gibney:* The Romans really hadn't made up their minds about Christianity in Paul's time.

*Bryson:* But they had the Christians in their midst.

*Gibney:* That raises a pretty central point about Paul. I think it's fair to say that Paul was making up their minds for them; that Paul, through the extraordinary chemistry of his preaching and writing, was transforming what seemed to the outsider to be a local sect of Judaism into the great universal religion that was always implicit in its message. And, as we can tell from Paul's Epistles, the job of transformation was sometimes pretty rough work. It was no cinch to be an organizer in those times.

*Case:* You could almost say that he saved Christianity from becoming merely a little sectarian influence among the Jews. This is exactly the purpose Paul has: to try to build a liturgy. We were talking about *Ephesians*, which is a liturgical letter. It marked a stage in the life of the community when tradition had begun to create a formal language, a common language they all recognized. He doesn't speak any longer of "foreigners" and "strangers," he speaks about the "people who are in the faith" or about the "household of God." The last is a liturgical phrase in which he's trying to express equality before God: all people, slaves and slaveholders, were equal before God. This, however, didn't always mean that they were equal before the law.

*Bryson:* No, they were equal only as long as they sat side by side in the house of worship. When they walked out, they became master and slave again.

*Case:* Exactly—because they walked out into this divided world.

*Bryson:* But the Christians regarded themselves as a brotherhood, didn't they?

*Case:* It was a very carefully united brotherhood. Paul said that the unity of the brotherhood provided the power, but he also said that the power came because they were united in Christ.

*Bryson:* Did he need a liturgy to make this brotherhood hang

together? *Do* you need ceremonials and ritual in order to make your brotherhood effective?

*Case*: Yes; it's part of the psychology of the unit. Paul needed some handles, and this developing liturgy gave him some.

*Gibney*: There's that passage in *Ephesians* where Paul refers to Christ as the head to which the whole body is joined. Here he's enunciating a great theory of the church, the new kind of church that was sharply distinguished from the old law which a lot of the Christians still accepted. Of course, all of Paul's life, as we see in these Epistles, was really a continuous fight against letting the Christians lapse into just another Jewish sect that depended for its unity on certain formal observances and certain ritual purifications and cleansings. This, to Paul, was quite beside the point; in fact, it was very dangerous. He constantly said that the law alone is not enough and that the spirit, the "sword of the spirit," has come to replace the law. That was a terribly difficult row to hoe because Paul was abandoning a very safe, if pretty parochial, set of hard and fast principles. And he was trying to explain to a lot of people who weren't necessarily philosophers that their bond had to be a hidden bond; it was a mystical bond, a unity of brotherhood in the spirit and in Christ. This was a pretty revolutionary thing at that time.

*Case*: You can see this reflected in his use of the word "church" to mean "temple." Actually, for three hundred years, there had been no temples, and yet it was a word that still meant something to the Greek and to the Jew. But Paul was giving it new meaning. He said that the Christian congregation was God's temple on earth and that He had no other habitation.

*Bryson*: We sometimes think of these very first days of Christianity as a time when things moved slowly. And yet, already in the Epistle to the people of Philippi, you have the pastoral letter; you move on to *Ephesians*, and you see a liturgy developing, which is a fairly late stage in the progress of religious thought; and then, in *Colossians*, the third of these Epistles, you find him defending the church as if it were already an institution that was strong enough to be marked out for attack, and could sustain it.

*Case*: He was faced with a heresy problem. The heresy was based on the idea that the materials of the world are a source of evil; therefore, God and matter must be antagonistic. This resulted in the conclusion that the universe couldn't possibly have come directly from God, and the belief that the things of the earth can't be incorporated into the Christian faith: you have to fight them all the time. This notion set up a contrast between things and ideas.

*Bryson*: It was probably a leakage into Christianity from one of the Eastern religions—Mazdeanism or Mithraism—like the Manichean heresy that was so prevalent a few centuries later. And isn't it true that we have to picture this time as one in which all kinds of new religions were floating around in the world?

*Case*: Oh, yes—it was a time of great fertility for religions, of new faiths and new sects. They were strongly competing with each other for the loyalties of the people.

*Gibney*: If you had attempted to make a denominational count

of all the religions in the eastern Mediterranean about the first or second century A.D., your census-takers would have gone mad. All the others failed because they were a weird combination of spirit-religions and ascending choirs of angels or devils (generally opposed, because they were overly dualistic). But Paul came along with this great central idea, which he hammers at continually, using the same phrases and the same words. He never lets go of his central thesis that it is Christ who has fulfilled history, has saved the world, has revolutionized the spirit of man, and has made obsolescent both the old ritual laws and these new religious aberrations.

*Bryson*: Is it irreverent to say that he was a great enough propagandist to know that if you have a good phrase, you don't let it die?

*Gibney*: I have the greatest admiration for the journalist in Paul. I'd love to hire him today, if we could find him somewhere, because I think he had a happy combination of idea and personality in all his writings.

*Case*: It's also evident from his strategy that he knew that he had to win the loyalty of individuals while he was building a church, a community. In these three Epistles there is one thing in common: he seldom uses the word "church" when he's talking about the local group; rather, he speaks to them as individuals. And when he talks of saints he's talking about people in regular jobs, doing ordinary things, but living conspicuously because of their devotion to God through their relationship to Christ.

*Bryson*: Mr. Gibney, a moment ago, used the word "mystical" in connection with Paul. It seems to me that the basic spirit of Paul is *not* mystical. I would say that the mystery elements in Christianity became apparent rather later, and that Paul's theology is much more a rational than a mystical theology. Am I wrong about that?

*Gibney*: Yes, I would disagree with you. I think that the very greatness of Paul is that he could combine the two so well. He could rise to great heights of spiritual description such as his image of Christ as the head of the body of the church. And then, in the next line, he could make very specific admonitions such as that the people in this young church had better cut down on their drinking or—

*Bryson*: Well, you're opposing the poet and the preacher to the moralist. I didn't quite mean *that* distinction. Perhaps you can't say that a man so great in his total powers was either rationalist or mystic, because of course he was both, but his appeal to me is on the rational basis.

*Gibney*: Ah, but this is the very greatness of Paul: he can appeal to *me* on the mystical basis.

*Case*: And in *Colossians*, for example, where I think he reached the pinnacle of his writing, he says: "We . . . do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will [meaning Christ's will] in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Now this is rather mystical. He has an absolute concept of the saving power available to anyone who is, as he says, in Christ—but at almost the same moment he can be the person who sees this in all its manifold applications. And so, as Mr. Gibney says, the great characteristic of Paul is that he appeals to the rationalist and the emotionalist at the same time.

*Bryson:* I suppose that's what makes him the perfect missionary and the perfect organizer. Is this theology that he was working at, that he was actually putting into words, very difficult to define? Christian theology after him became a pretty complicated business. Is Paul's theology complicated?

*Gibney:* It is difficult because so much is merely implicit in what he says. The church became much bigger and more highly developed after his time, but Paul's theology came out almost on an off-the-cuff basis. He was, after all, first and foremost a missionary, and his chief concern was to get these young churches started. The theology developed almost as a polemic or an *ad hoc* instruction manual. Paul would hear about some error and set out to attack it, or he would hear about an excess of the law and set out to clarify what he meant. I think one of the great difficulties that later generations encountered in interpreting Paul is that the very language he used to discuss quite elevated concepts is sometimes inadequate to the task. It is almost a trader's language. Of course, once you start talking about textual problems in the Bible you could go on all day.

*Bryson:* For the rest of your life, I should think.

*Case:* But I think that he makes an attempt to get out of this complication. For example, one school of thought said that religion is knowledge—it's sheer reason. And the other said No, it isn't—it's feeling. Paul said you must have the intellect, but it isn't merely an intellectual approach. At one point he said that being religious is being rooted and grounded in love.

*Bryson:* But in spite of Paul, aren't people making that same distinction and pursuing that same argument even now?

*Case:* Yes, indeed they are.

*Bryson:* Because some men want to organize their ultimate sanctions in terms of reason and some want to do it in terms of feeling. I suppose the really great religious leader does both, as Mr. Gibney says. But this thing that Paul was rejecting in *Colossians* is a somewhat difficult idea for us to grasp in modern terms. We don't think of religion nowadays as something that has nothing to do with life here on earth; we think of it as something that infuses the spirit into life, don't we? Which was Paul's position, of course.

*Gibney:* Of course. But I do feel that one of Paul's great problems was the fact that so many people of his time had their religion rooted in tangibles. It was either a fixed set of observances to perform, or else it was a hierarchy of very visible deities on view in the Temple of Astarte. Paul's difficulty was that, having set up a universal faith with a universal idea, it was inevitable that scores of rascals would try to hook onto it, basing their views on the fact that the universal idea seemed rather similar to their own concrete observances.

*Case:* It was when he saw all these little splinter sects developing that he began to put emphasis on unity in the church.

*Bryson:* But doesn't modern Biblical scholarship recognize that the kind of strict legalism that Paul was revolting against, in his own Hebrew training, was only *one* part of the Hebrew tradition? In other words, Christ's teachings were not antagonistic to a lot of things that were very ancient in the Hebrew religion. Don't we say that now?

*Gibney*: Of course we do. It was the worship of legalism in certain phases of Judaism with which Paul made an abrupt break.

*Bryson*: A narrow legalism that he himself had been guilty of.

*Gibney*: He was the "Jew of the Jews," as he often said, the Hebrew of the Hebrews who worshipped the law and was an ardent antagonist of Christianity. But after his conversion he became as enthusiastic a missionary as he had been an opponent and persecutor.

*Bryson*: Paul could scarcely have done anything halfway. That wasn't his way of working.

*Case*: No, that's very true. Paul was a man who could use compromise on occasion, but it obviously revolted him. And you can see in his constant emphasis on the law how worried he was, and how fierce about it—doubtless because he'd been a Pharisee himself.

*Bryson*: Is it necessary to know all of these things to read the Epistles of St. Paul today?

*Case*: No, I think one can read them with great satisfaction because they are universal; he deals with problems that are today's problems and tomorrow's problems and the problems of eternity. I do think, however, that it helps if one can have by his side some kind of interpretation—to give one an insight into what Paul was trying to say and the relationship of his attempt to our life today.

*Bryson*: The applications are there; but, of course, there are veils of history and event and language between us and him.

*Gibney*: Paul was essentially a man of many levels. And the great joy of reading him is that you can pass successively from the level of religious comfort to the level of philosophy and ultimately, if you're lucky, to the level of mystic religious feeling itself.

*Case*: And I think his writings must always be related to his dramatic conversion, which gave him a strong sense of zealotry.

*Bryson*: Yes, I suppose Paul is the perfect example in all history of the man who, being granted a vision, has the power to make other people see it.

## E. E. CUMMINGS

### *The Enormous Room*

*(As broadcast December 30, 1956)*

LLOYD FRANKENBERG • ROBERT J. MANNING • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: I suppose there's an advantage in spending one's allotted jail term when one is very young. When you're young you can see in the experience either a profound tragedy or, as in the case of Cummings, a kind of fable of man's existence. He seems to have made one out of it, although his prison experience was extremely moving and tragic to him; it seared him, but he somehow surmounted it.

*Frankenberg*: I think he surmounted it quite nobly, not only in

*The Enormous Room* but in many of the poems that came after.

*Bryson*: But is that because he didn't feel any guilt? After all, he wasn't in jail for anything that *he* considered a crime.

*Frankenberg*: I think he put himself in jail. He states that rather clearly toward the beginning of the book, where he's being interviewed after his friend B. has been unceremoniously yanked away from *Section Sanitaire Vingt-et-Un*—

*Bryson*: Let's place it first: this is during World War I, and he and his friend B. were Americans who were driving ambulances for the French army. They didn't like the French army very well, nor the American officers.

*Frankenberg*: Well, they hadn't had much experience with the French army. They had served three months of their six months' enlistment and their superior, a man conveniently called Mr. A., disapproved of their fraternizing with the "dirty Frenchmen," as he called them. They insisted on doing that, and, as a result, A. kept B. and Cummings washing his car most of the time.

*Manning*: It was this sort of treatment—plus, I think, Cummings's own disappointment with what he saw of this "noble" effort—that caused him to become almost flippant when he was confronted with authority. He and his friend were accused of writing some indiscreet letters which had been held up by the censors.

*Frankenberg*: But nothing was clearly established. A little man with a moustache drove up to the camp one day, and the next thing Cummings knew, his friend B. had been hustled off. When Cummings was called in for interrogation, they told him that B. was a great criminal. He protested that he didn't think his friend B. *could* be one. . .

*Monsieur asked, "You met B— on the pacquebot?"  
I said I did.*

*Monsieur glanced significantly around. The rosette [one of the other members of the commission] nodded a number of times. The moustache rang [the man with the moustache is always twirling it as if he were ringing for a drink].*

*I understood that these kind people were planning to make me out the innocent victim of a wily villain, and could not forbear a smile. C'est rigolo, I said to myself; they'll have a great time doing it.*

And a few pages further on, when they have concluded their investigation and have decided that he's really all right, they ask: "*Est-ce que vous détestez les boches?*"

*Bryson*: Better translate that—

*Frankenberg*: "Do you hate the Germans?"—or the Boches, as they were known then.

*I had won my own case. The question was purely perfunctory. To walk out of the room a free man I had merely to say yes. My examiners were sure of my answer. The*



*rosette was leaning forward and smiling encouragingly. The moustache was making little oui's in the air with his pen. And Noyon had given up all hope of making me out a criminal. I might be rash, but I was innocent; the dupe of a superior and malign intelligence. I would probably be admonished to choose my friends more carefully next time, and that would be all . . . Deliberately, I framed my answer: "Non, j'aime beaucoup les français."*

*Bryson:* He loves the French but he won't admit that he hates the Germans—and off he goes to jail.

*Frankenberg:* Well, he knew that would take them on another tack, which it does, and they ask: "Don't you believe in all these atrocities?"

*Bryson:* But he *wanted* to go to jail!

*Frankenberg:* Of course. He wanted to accompany his friend, and he says at the end of it: "The attempt of the three gentlemen sitting before me to endow my friend and myself with different fates had irrevocably failed."

*Manning:* The book that results from this decision on Cummings's part is a fascinating book and a remarkable protest—not against prison or not against a single authority, but a *book* of protest. I am struck by one notion about it, now that I've been rereading it. I read it first when I was about the age that Cummings was when he wrote it, about twenty-two or twenty-three. At that time I found myself agreeing with everything about it, including the way he'd invited the experience that he was writing about. I find on rereading it that I am still fascinated by the book, I still think it's one of the most remarkable books of protest in the twentieth century—and beautifully written, to boot—but this time I'm struck by the almost flippant or impudent nature of both the experience and his treatment of it. It is almost a juvenile delinquent's protest against things that he later grew to accept—no, not accept, but to handle more maturely.

*Bryson:* Are you now impatient with young men who just like to cock a snook at authority, Mr. Manning?

*Manning:* If I could have done it then as effectively as Cummings was able to do, I perhaps would have done it, or at least done it more often.

*Bryson:* But there's a great deal left even after you reject the impudence—

*Frankenberg:* I think that the flippancy conceals a great sense of moral values. The moral value is found on the first page of the book in a letter that Cummings's father wrote to President Wilson when his son had disappeared and they couldn't find any trace of him. The father says he hates to take the President's time when the world is in such a grave situation, but these are the facts and no self-respecting government can afford to let human values go to smash this way.

*Bryson:* And the facts were that the boy had disappeared into prison, nobody could find out where he was, and he just languished there.

*Frankenberg*: Yes, there was no charge against him.

*Manning*: Could we establish here just what the "enormous room" was? Of course, in physical fact it was a huge barn, a prison for suspected persons of all sorts—black marketeers, foreigners, people caught wandering around in southern France. But in Cummings's handling of it, *The Enormous Room* is a sort of microcosm of the world of inanimate authority, of the mass pressures that are inflicted on any individual trying to live and learn and love in this time of ours. And it's because of that that I found myself wanting to make my original qualification; the sort of healthy, robust, almost immature protest is what makes the book, in the end, a maturer thing to have read.

*Frankenberg*: It's interesting to compare this with several other books written about the same time by Kafka, who expresses a bewilderment with all the mass pressures that surround his characters. Kafka meets it, it seems to me, with a rather sidelong gesture. He leaves you with a feeling of almost complete hopelessness. There is no appeal beyond these dark mysterious forces; the Castle never responds. Cummings is protesting—and ever since *The Enormous Room* has been protesting—these anonymous mass forces, but always with affirmation. He has the feeling that the individual will win out even if he is shot through the head.

*Bryson*: How much of that is a result of Cummings's superb capacity to make the people he writes about come out as *real* people? It's hard to believe in a "mass of humanity" when you've got these sharply-cut images of people that stand up like people you've known yourself. Which isn't true of Kafka, and isn't true of a lot of the Existentialist writers; but Cummings makes all the people he deals with individuals to the last degree.

*Manning*: He presents all the filth, the indignity, the brutality, the awful things—

*Bryson*: The obscenity; he shrinks at nothing.

*Manning*: Right. But then he says: isn't it wonderful that man exists? and how wonderful it is to be alive when you can have individuals of this sort around.

*Bryson*: Particularly himself.

*Manning*: Yes, because he's delighted with his ability to survive the experience, and to discover individual after individual who can thrill him by surviving it, too.

*Frankenberg*: There's one point where his affection even extends to the mouldy piece of bread that they give the prisoners at La Ferté Macé. He says that he sniffed it gingerly, and it had a smell that reminded him of an old attic in which kites and other toys are gently fading away into obscurity.

*Bryson*: That's a good example of his allusiveness which still retains its wonderful concreteness. I've never read anybody else who could do it in quite the same way. But doesn't that raise a question? Did he really suffer or did he have a kind of youthful imperviousness to what was going on around him?

*Manning*: At the time I'm not sure that he knew that he was having some of these impressions. Physically, I think, he suffered con-

siderably and he was a man, as we know, of deep sensitivity. He already was a very interesting painter. He had started to write poetry, although not much. Considerable pain must have been inflicted on his sensitivity, not to mention his body. But, whether consciously or unconsciously, he must have been actually overjoyed by some of the experiences he had there, by the discoveries he made about himself and about certain other human beings. He dismisses most of the inhabitants of *The Enormous Room*, i.e., the world, but says of the rest that these are the interesting ones, the ones who can make even *The Enormous Room* habitable.

*Bryson*: Does he give you the impression that if he had taken the trouble to go through all the other inhabitants of *The Enormous Room*, he would have found them just as interesting as individuals? It seems to me he can believe in almost anybody. Take his treatment of these fairly stupid little French soldiers, who stand around with pistols bigger than they are and make fierce gestures; his whole attitude toward them, although they're the very embodiment of the authority and the ineptitude that he hates, is one of affection.

*Frankenberg*: Well, I think one of the points of the book is that sensitivity always wins out, whether it gets beaten to a pulp or not, and the people that he likes the most are the ones who exhibit in one form or another great sensitivity. He doesn't have much truck with the brutal ones. The *Directeur*, whom he calls Apollyon, is one of those people who have given in to mass pressures; and to the extent that they give in, either from abject fear or bullying, Cummings dislikes them as people.

*Bryson*: I think what I'm trying to say is that Cummings's sympathy is so wide that although he dislikes all abstract pressures and all bureaucracies, put him face to face with almost any human being and he realizes that he's an individual. The trouble with the rest of them is that he hasn't been close enough to them.

*Frankenberg*: Yes, he can hardly fail to find a spark of humanity in even the worst of them.

*Manning*: But at one point he explains:

*Put the bracelets on an ordinary man, tell him he's a bad egg, treat him rough, shove him into the jug or its equivalent . . . and he will become one of three animals—a rabbit, that is to say timid; a mole, that is to say stupid; or a hyena, that is to say Harree the Hollander.*

The Hollander is one of the inmates of *The Enormous Room*. But Cummings is not really interested in talking about the rabbits or the moles or the hyenas. The people he chooses to tell us about are, like himself, outside these categories.

*Frankenberg*: It has just occurred to me that the rabbit, the mole, and the hyena, in a sense describe Kafka's characters. In Kafka's world, everybody is ordinary.

*Bryson*: Kafka and a whole string of authors have felt the pressure of a mass society. We can't go into all there is in that, but most of them said: "This is depressing and hopeless and I can write a good

book about it but that's about all I can do." Cummings is distinguished from the rest of them because he says, in effect: "Isn't it wonderful to be alive and to be an individual in spite of all these massed pressures?"

*Frankenberg*: Yes, exactly. And I think it's because he has such an intense belief in *being*, though not in the way it's been popularized recently by the Existentialists, because they put the stress on engagement, on action. To Cummings, action is less important than a very active kind of being; the verb "to be" is for him an active verb.

*Manning*: One of the characters he admires most in *The Enormous Room* is "the Zulu," this Pole who almost never speaks. But by what Cummings refers to as "such short laconicisms of movement"—one of the typically bright Cummings phrases, incidentally—the Zulu expresses himself far better than any man Cummings has ever met. In trying to describe this man, he arrives at precisely the word: he's an *is*—

*Bryson*: An *is*?

*Manning*: I would like, if I may, to read that passage, because it has a bearing not only on what we're discussing but on his poetry. I think there are several elements in it. He's describing the Zulu —

*Bryson*: Who isn't a Zulu at all, of course.

*Manning*: Oh, he's not a real Zulu! That was Cummings's private name for him. In fact, all the names in the book are private names cooked up by B. and Cummings to describe these characters. But this is what he says about the Zulu:

*His angular anatomy extended and collected itself with an effortless spontaneity which is the prerogative of perhaps fairies, or at any rate of those things in which we no longer believe. But he was more. There are certain things in which one is unable to believe for the simple reason that he never ceases to feel them. Things of this sort—things which are always inside of us and in fact are us and which consequently will not be pushed off or away where we can begin thinking about them—are no longer things; they, and the us which they are, equal A Verb; an IS. The Zulu, then, I must perforce call an IS.*

*Bryson*: He forces your imagination in discussing the Zulu much more than he does with the other characters. He just sort of *felt* the Zulu and he believed that the Zulu felt him.

*Manning*: That's true.

*Bryson*: With some of the other characters, the Wanderer, for instance, or Jean le Nègre, this big, magnificent Negro whom he loves so much because of his braggadocio and his complete lack of morality—in those cases you realize that you would have felt just the same way about them, if you'd been there.

*Manning*: Yes, the Wanderer is one of the best characters in the book. When this fine man with the big head of black hair—"black as imagination," I believe he calls it—is finally taken off to another prison, it almost seems to Cummings and the others there that it is

being done only to separate him from his wife and children.

*Bryson*: As if there were no other purpose.

*Manning*: No one can conceive of any other purpose for it. It's a tremendously sad parting. And when he leaves, there is one of those little bits of prose that show you Cummings's own sort of gladness to be alive in the midst of filth and sadness and cruelty:

*With him disappeared unspeakable sunlight, and the dark,  
keen, bright strength of the earth.*

*Bryson*: I don't mean to decry prose, but this is a *poet's* way of writing. What does Cummings mean when he says that you meet the mass pressure of existence "with courage and love and art"?

*Manning*: He's saying, really, that *The Enormous Room*—that is, the world—can be a monstrous place in which to live, so monstrous that in even attempting to describe the monstrousness of it you're apt to turn almost jolly. But he's saying, too, that it's still a place to live in, and the way to live in it is to have courage and love and art. For "art" substitute your own individualism, your own area of private feeling, your own notion of what you are and why you're doing what you're doing and why you are, in effect, surviving *The Enormous Room*.

*Frankenberg*: The one thing that survives in all his misery is a kind of joy that emerges later in some of his happiest poems.

*Bryson*: Cummings seem to me all of a piece; sometimes he works within the confines of a verse form, here he worked outside them. But always he has this almost miraculous power of phrase. So *he* has art. But what does that do for the rest of us—are we just to enjoy? You can't deny that this man has a moral meaning; he's telling us something.

*Manning*: I think that engagement with what you are doing is the only way to find the moral meaning in this. Cummings does narrow down quite precisely; he almost says that as far as he's concerned, anyone who isn't an artist is going to have a very hard time making do in *The Enormous Room* that life is.

*Bryson*: But am I exaggerating the extent to which he differs from so many of these other people—his courage, his art, his field of action, his extraordinary capacity for love?

*Frankenberg*: I think that for Cummings the word "individual" almost means artist. That is, the individual is one who believes in his own being; the artist is then a dedicated individual, one who pushes it further than other people do—toward painting, toward words, toward building a cathedral.

*Bryson*: But that doesn't necessarily imply a capacity to love other individuals.

*Frankenberg*: Well, I think the word "individual" for Cummings includes that capacity for love.

*Bryson*: I see. That's what he means by it. Well, what about these characters? Do you suppose he made them up? Take, for instance, Jean le Nègre, this enormous, completely immoral—no, not immoral—this rascal; he *was* a rascal—he was cruel, he beat up police

for the fun of it, he betrayed women, he stole, he did everything he shouldn't have done. And yet Cummings loves him. I wonder if he was a figment of Cummings's imagination?

*Manning:* There's a hilarious listing in the book of some of his offenses. After he had done these things, beaten up policemen and so on, the French government hauled him in and tried to charge him; he claimed, in quick succession, that he was the British Lord of The Admiralty, that he was the son of an important official by the Queen of England, that he hated all Frenchmen—

*Bryson:* He was wearing the uniform of a British officer.

*Manning:* That finally saved him. Everything he told them was a lie, but he had on the British officer's uniform and they sent him to prison for that.

*Bryson:* There's magnificent humor in it, but under it lies this curious moral faith in the mere individuality of somebody. It doesn't matter what you are; if you are just *that* with sufficient positivism and courage, Cummings can love you. These people don't know that they're great individuals. That's why I asked the question whether or not they were figments of Cummings's imagination. This man is a great poet; maybe he just saw a lot of commonplace people and made this wonderful inferno out of them, peopled with angels and arch-angels.

*Manning:* And, of course, this experience didn't cause Cummings to give up the idea of exposing himself to all these pressures and the anonymous authority that he was talking about; because, upon being released from this confinement in The Enormous Room, he went back home, got himself into a reasonably decent state of health, and immediately joined the United States Army. And if that isn't asking for more of the same, I don't know what it would be. Not as bad, perhaps, but similar.

*Bryson:* And, of course, this goes back to your first remark or perhaps it was Mr. Frankenberg's: this is not a war book.

*Manning:* Except in the sense that it is about the enormous war that goes on everywhere—

*Bryson:* Which goes on all the time—the war between the person and the mass.

*Frankenberg:* It could happen at any time, anywhere. It *happened* to happen during World War I, but it was not connected with the war much beyond that.

*Bryson:* And I suppose we ought to be eternally grateful that one of the very few sensitive and gifted people who have tried to express a courageous attitude toward the pressures of modern life, also happens to be such a great writer, and can make it sing the way he does.

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